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THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

A Novel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

BARRILI.

Authorised Translation from the Italian.

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THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

CHAPTER I.

Hats off, my readers! for we are in the house of the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo. The Castelnuovos are numerous on the face of the earth, and you will, perhaps, expect me to say to which of the many I have conducted you. But, with your permission, I will not do so, for the sake of propriety and for reasons of personal safety. The Sub-Prefect of my Castelnuovo would be quite capable of taking it amiss, and of having me arrested as a good-for-nothing and a vagabond the first time the whim seized me to visit his province. Now, seeing that I have a great wish to return there, and to be unmolested in my aimless trips, you will, I

hope assent that in this particular I act prudently in confining myself to mere suggestions.

For the purposes of my story it is enough for you to know that it is called Castelnuovo (new castle), as opposed to Castelvecchio (old castle). When I was there two years ago Castelvecchio was a ruin on the summit of Monte Acuto, which is one of the peaks usually mentioned by novelists in their scenic descriptions.

Castelnuovo is a town built lower down between the top of the Gemmi and the right bank of the Bedonia, a torrent in which scholars have discovered two Keltic roots, and in which the washerwomen of Castelnuovo still seek two ounces of water during eight months in the year.

Castelnuovo, as the name tells you, ought to have its own castle, but the ancient building has disappeared under a more modern structure. The loop-holes had

been converted into windows, the great tower, perforated with holes, whitewashed and restored, was used for nearly all the offices and the respective habitations of the representatives of Government. For instance, there was the Sub-Prefecture, the Prefecture, the Recorder, the Keeper of Mortgages; and the Royal Carabineers were not wanting, commanded by the best of marshals. The Examiner of Weights and Measures lived further off, as also the Customs Officer, with other officials whose names I cannot remember. Space was limited, and did not admit of placing there the great Government family of Castelnuovo; indeed, it was said that very soon the Registrar would have to quit the Government Palace, partly because, having half a dozen boys duly registered, he was not comfortable there, partly because he was in the Sub-Prefect's way, though the family of the latter only consisted of two persons—husand wife—Sub-Prefect and Sub-Prefectess.

That title, "Sub-Prefectess," does not come very readily to our lips, does it? But I assure you it is impossible to alter it, and it is well for us that we have nothing besides the name to digest! This lady Sub-Prefectess was dry and hard as a stock fish, with a withered skin like parchment; the best of women, however, and also agreeable in conversation so long as she avoided the topic of her husband's grievances. Unfortunately she spoke of them a dozen times a day! But, on the other hand, to do her justice, the Sub-Prefectess had right on her side. Those blessed Ministers who passed by full of promises which they never maintained were enough to provoke a saint, let alone the Sub-Prefectess of Castelnuovo, who was hardly a paragon of good temper. There had been eight or nine promotions since her husband had a claim to advancement, and these good gentlemen in the Ministry had always overlooked him. Of course they did not like the Sub-

Prefect, because he was a talented man, and because his province was the best governed in Italy, for to get on in life with these gentlemen one must needs be born and bred an ass, and let things go topsy turvy in the administration of the country.

The Sub-Prefect listened and smiled; the philosopher always smiles. The greater the depth of the sea, the calmer it appears on the surface. These Olympian calms are the proud strength of the sea, of philosophers, and of overlooked Sub-Prefects. After all, the Cavaliere Tiraquelli saw the day of justice approaching. Had he a great opinion of himself? or was he nursing a secret—one of those secrets which are never disclosed to a soul, not even to one's wife in those confidential hours when the public man lays aside the sceptre of power and assumes the humble garb of a private individual?

We shall soon see, for we have now entered the house, and are actually in the reception

room. The Cavaliere Tiraquelli receives every Wednesday. An unheard-of novelty in the annals of the Sub-Prefecture of Castelnuovo and for two months already he has received some of the first county families. These Wednesday receptions gave the town folk food for gossip, for the remaining six days in the week. You, my astute readers, will therefore readily understand that this is the reason why the Cavaliere Tiraquelli finds his present quarters too confined, and will consequently oust the Registrar. The Home Secretary, who has not yet thought about putting the Cavalier on the Promotion List, has promised him the whole of the second floor in the Government Palace on condition that he continues to give his Wednesday receptions. There is something behind all this, don't you think so? At any rate we shall see. Here is a Sub-Prefect drawing a salary of four thousand francs, possessing nothing of his own, no extra pay for official expendi-

ture, and yet he actually allows himself the extravagance of weekly receptions! True, there was no supper given on those evenings, and the only drink procurable was a glass of sugar and water, but then there was the lighting, and the tuner, who was required for the pianoforte every week. You may observe the courtesy of the Minister who listens to the Sub-Prefect's complaints about the closeness of his quarters; and who is disposed to concede to him the use of the whole of the second floor, removing the offices of the Sub-Prefecture to the first, from whence the Registrar will have to pack off as soon as possible. You must see that there is a secret underneath all this, and you will certainly be anxious to know what it is. But I beg you will not trouble your head about the matter, I will tell it you myself at the proper time, and you may be sure that this will be before long.

At the Wednesday receptions of the Sub-

Prefect of Castelnuovo, all the branches of the Ministry were duly represented by various members of the families of each, both masculine and feminine. As to the country residents, at first they held themselves aloof, especially the ladies who, unaccustomed to parties and balls, perhaps feared to cut a sorry figure beside other women who had travelled more, and who were conversant with the usages of polite society.

By degrees, however, their bashfulness had vanished, and these worthy ladies went to the Prefecture, married girls, spinsters and all; and it did one good to see them dancing, while the graver men talked politics, finance and administration. The leader of the town band, a good-natured youth of high aspirations, played the piano tolerably well, and dedicated polkas and mazurkas of his own composition to the young ladies of Castelnuovo, which he sometimes succeeded in getting published at Turin or Milan. All this

gave a little spice to the life at Castelnuovo Bedonia, which had hitherto been so insipid, and made it appear something of a capital, not to say a small Paris.

There was one flaw, however, in these Wednesday evenings at the Sub-Prefecture. So true is it that nothing is perfect here below. Young men were not plentiful at Castelnuovo Bedonia. But, by way of compensation, the Government officials danced, and they had almost the requisite agility for this noble gymnastic exercise. From time to time some new guest would make his appearance; either an Inspector, sent by Government to examine the skin of the coming grape in one of the Communes, or an officer of the Carabineers who came to look round the Castelnuovo barracks, or a student in his vacation, or a roving antiquarian in search of unfrequented paths.

The species of these emerited idlers is not yet extinct, indeed it would seem that it has

a tendency to increase, since the invention of Alpine Clubs; and *apropos* of Alpine climbers, twelve of them had arrived all at once from the chief provincial town, with the intention of ascending Monte Acuto, whose 1,132 metres above the level of the sea were hardly worth their giving themselves so much trouble for.

It was more desirable that they should visit the geologists and students of prehistoric archæology, the former in order to see the beautiful calcareous concretions, the quartz and the traces of minerals presented by the rocks, the latter in order to be shown the caves full of bones, which were to be found in the sides of the mountain. As yet only one archæologist had come to Castelnuovo, and fortunately he did not show any inclination to go away again. He was not by profession a scientific man, but simply a dilettante, and as yet he had published no work on the "*Homo diluvii testis;*"

he threatened however to do so as soon as possible. The neolithic and archæolithic periods were his study, and the caves of Monte Acuto presented him with marvellous specimens in arrow heads, axes and flints, amulets of serpentine marble and jade, pot-sherds, deposits of ashes and fossilized bones, shell ornaments, lumps of ochre, earth, &c. The deposits in the sides of the mountain engaged his particular attention, he studied the shapes of the bones, teeth, jaws, and horns that he found, in order to ascertain what species of domestic animal the most nearly related to the deer or the dog, could have lived in the passes of Monte Acuto coeval with man ten or fifteen thousand years ago. With the boldness of imagination he went still further. Not content with having discovered the "*ursus spelaeus*," which was of sufficiently respectable antiquity, he hoped also to find the "*Elephas primogenius*," which is so to speak the Progenitor of the elephan-

tine race. Note that the discovery of an elephant would have been a great triumph, especially in a part of Italy untraversed by King Pyrrhus, who was the only person who could have left any traces to mislead the men of science of the future.

Thus learned as we have seen, this Duke of Francavilla was however, not at all tiresome. He was a thoroughly fine young fellow, sympathetic, witty, polished and tractable, a democratic Prince, a happy combination of a great man, and a good one. He danced besides like— in truth I cannot find a simile. The ladies of Castelnuovo affirmed that he danced like an angel, but then is it true that angels dance? At any rate he danced well, led the most wonderful quadrille parties, organized charades, in fact his social talents were innumerable, and finally it was he who introduced the skating rink into Castelnuovo. Not so bad for an amateur archælogist? You may imagine

therefore how gay were the Wednesday receptions at the Sub-Perfecture of Castelnuovo Bedonia, after this young Duke's arrival; music, dancing and flirtation were the order of the day, and everyone bowed down to the new idol.

The Sub-Prefectess was gaining an immortal reputation; the Sub-Prefect laughed quietly in his corner, and foresaw a great day not far distant when the whole of the province of Castelnuovo would be subject to the government policy, or rather to the party which sat at the head of the government.

For this he was working with a loftiness of conception scarcely necessary in his subordinate position. Would you like to hear him talk? to catch him in the act of unfolding the subtleties of his policy with the most recondite artifices of eloquence?

The Cavaliere Tiraquelli had led one of his guests out of the room under the reasonable enough pretext of smoking a cigar; they

were walking under a portico overlooking the court-yard connecting the Sub-Prefect's quarters with the offices of the Sub-Prefecture.

"I assure you," the representative of government was saying to his interlocutor, a man getting on for sixty, short, and with a mind placid enough for ten ordinary mortals, as his plump cheeks plainly indicated. "I assure you, Signor Prospero, you will be Cavaliere. What did I say—*Cavaliere?* I mean *Commendatore* for certain, if everything succeeds in the way the minister wishes, you are sure of it; have the collar ready to hand. There! I pledge you my word for it, and that is the word of the government," he added, with an emphatic gesture.

"For my part," replied the other, shrugging his shoulders, "I wish that it were all arranged. But you will understand, Signor Cavaliere"—

"What?—what difficulty can Signor

Prospero encounter in an affair of this kind, and with the domestic authority too, with which, Heaven be praised, he is invested?"

"Ah! greater than you think," replied Signor Prospero. "If that little vixen took it into her head not to wish it, what could I do?"

"You have no reason to fear anything of the kind," observed the Cavaliere Tiraquelli, gravely. "Should the Signorina refuse, there must be someone else in the way. Shall I explain? Well then, there is no one else, at least not as far as we can find out. You on one side as uncle and guardian, I on the other as a public official whose duty it is to know everything, have neither of us any knowledge or indication to lead us to suspect anything of that sort."

"True, Signor Cavaliere, very true. But if I may speak openly, it is not my niece's heart that makes me anxious, but her head. She does not love anyone, partly because she

has not yet found anyone to suit her, but also chiefly because she will not renounce her liberty; she will do as she likes, satisfy her own caprices in fact."

"All that will pass off."

"Let us hope so," said Signor Prospero, with a hearty laugh; "but I warn you she is eccentric. Only fancy, she had hardly left school before she wanted to go to the Pole!"

"To the Arctic Pole?"

"Arctic or Antartic, I don't know, but the fact remains that she came out with this idea, fished up from God knows where."

"Perhaps in a geographical treatise," remarked the Sub-Prefect, judiciously.

"It may be so. But what the devil possesses masters to teach geography to girls? What use can geography be to them?"

The Sub-Prefect stopped him with a gesture.

"Signor Prospero," he said, "geography

is a necessary acquisition for civilized men. You are perhaps not aware that a geographical society flourishes near the seat of government under the patronage of the King, and especially assisted by the Ministry?"

"If this is so, I will say no more," replied Signor Prospero, bowing. "Geography may be a necessary acquisition for men, but how so for women, pray?"

"Ah, there you may be right!" interrupted the Sub-Prefect with an air of benevolent condescension, "and I suppose you told the young lady that women have no business with the Poles."

"Of course I told her so! But would you like to hear what answer this extraordinary creature gave me? 'Well, then,' she said, 'I shall go to the Equator; there are two-thirds of Africa to be explored, the influents of the Nile to be discovered.' Did she say influents or affluents?—I don't know."

"Affluents or influents, it is all the same," remarked the Sub-Prefect. "I think, however, it is more correct to say affluents—we must be careful even about the patrimony of language, Signor Prospero, we who are the guardians of authority. But about this question of the Equator? I hope you upheld your authority."

"Of authority in truth I have but little," confessed Signor Prospero: "I contented myself with telling her that it is too hot in Africa and too cold at the Poles, that I could not make up my mind all of a sudden to accompany her; that, in short, there were the tuition accounts to set right, and that this work, as necessary at least as the accomplishment of geography, would take me a year."

"It is a year gained," said the Sub-Prefect, "and in a year a girl may change many times—Signorina Adéle is romantic, and I am not altogether sorry for it. Our young

man will take advantage of this sentiment, and he will not find it a difficult task, because, to tell you the truth, he is over head and ears in love, and lovers always see through the eyes of the beloved one. Signor Prospero, we will make a duchess of her, of your beautiful niece. Say candidly, does this suit you?"

"Indeed it could not be more to my taste; those Gamberinis, so proud of their titles, who look down upon the country with such contempt, from the heights of a castle overburdened with mortgages"—

"Speak low for Heaven's sake!"

"You are right, but the professor is at the piano, and in there you could scarcely hear a cannon shot. Those Gamberinis, I say, will be livid with rage—and the poor young countess! I can see her ugly looks when she hears that His Grace the Duke of Francavilla came here to study anthropophagy."

"Anthropology, Signor Prospero!"

"Well then, anthropology, only I am not acquainted with either of these good people. The rage the Gamberinis would be in would please me mightily! And if Adéle makes up her mind, I shall not be the one to gainsay it. But we must be cautious, Signor Cavaliere, transact the affair with the greatest diplomacy."

"This is the maxim of the politician," observed the Sub-Prefect opportunely; "the directing hand must be of iron, and he who is guided must be unconscious thereof."

"And you tell me," resumed Signor Prospero, "that His Excellency the Minister"—

The Sub-Prefect cut him short.

"Confidentially," he said, familiarly taking the arm of his interlocutor, "confidentially, Commendatore—allow me henceforth to call you so—if I remain at Castelnuovo, Bedonia, it is for this alone. Here we have a part, not the whole, of a vast political scheme."

CHAPTER II.

At this unexpected, mysterious, and confidential communication, made to him by the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia, Signor Prospero stared with eyes and mouth wide open.

"What do you mean?" he said, after remaining a moment in this attitude of astonishment.

"All this is to come of my niece's marriage?"

"Of course! And if you think a little, can you not also understand it? My dear Signor Prospero, I will explain it to you. Follow me attentively. First of all, in what do the riches of a country consist? Landed property, you will answer; landed property, which pays interest and guarantees incomes which are represented by their visible and transferable means of payment; gold, silver,

and paper. It is a precept of economy that there must be a limit to the quantity of paper money beyond which its value diminishes by so much as the value of the things sought for increases. Notwithstanding, as gold is a fixed payment, it is desirable that paper, which is a transitory medium of exchange, should be plentiful rather than scarce, causing thereby greater circulation of capital and a tendency to increased expenditure, by which all industries and trades benefit, and consequently all classes of citizens also. Do you follow me, Signor Prospero?"

"I follow, but really—I do not yet see"—

"You will see presently. The rich, Signor Prospero, the proprietors of the soil, are the distributors of life among a people. But they alone are not sufficient, just as in the human body that combined system of veins and arteries which propels the blood from the heart to the extremities, and from the extremities sends it back to the heart, is not

alone of importance. I repeat, they are not in themselves sufficient. By the side of wealth, the strength of the present, there is tradition, the wealth of the past, which may be both the strength and the wealth of the future. To leave metaphor aside, there is the aristocracy, the great historical families, to whom princes and states owe so much glory and prosperity. A country has as much need of glory as it has of bread. Glory also is an element of prosperity. A country with no traditions is like a house without pictures. There is the bed, the table, the cabinets, the chairs, but that bare wall gives it an appearance of being unfurnished. Do you understand me, Signor Prospero?"

"To be sure," replied the other, who was beginning to get confused.

"Well, then," resumed the Sub-Prefect triumphantly, "what ought we to do to adorn that great house we call by the name of country? If I mistake not, we should jealously

maintain its traditions. It is not wise to try and upset everything; it is useless, I may add, as already shown in England under Cromwell, and worse still in France under Robespierre. Reaction fatally succeeds action. This is a law taught by history, as it is a law of mechanics. A prudent and provident State should transform that which it cannot change, reserve all its forces, and by union multiply them. Do you not think so?"

"I am entirely of your opinion," replied Signor Prospero, who understood nothing at all.

"That is right!" resumed the orator. "You agree with us then in admitting the necessity of these alliances between different families, between illustrious names and great wealth? But that does not suffice."

"What! not enough yet?" murmured Signor Prospero.

"Certainly not, and the reason will not

escape your perspicacity. The task of a wise Government does not end here; it must go further; it must promote these alliances between province and province, in order that each part of the great social body may feel the beneficent effects thereof, and the body itself be consolidated in the interweaving of all the parts of which it is composed. Now, what are we Prefects—I say Prefects, because promotion cannot be long delayed—what are we, if not the instruments of this investigation, of this watchful solicitude, of this"—

Cavaliere Tirequalli sought the substantive, and Signor Prospero suggested one to him.

"Matrimonial scheme," he said.

"Signor Prospero!" exclaimed the Sub-Prefect, drawing himself up as though he would display the whole extent of his offended dignity.

But he soon perceived, by Signor Pros-

pero's innocent expression, that his interlocutor had not intended to say anything malicious, and he resumed smiling—

"We may also say matrimonial scheme, if marriages are not beyond the pale of these elevated ideas. Besides, we exercise the equally noble office of seeking merit wherever it is to be found, of patronising and rewarding it for the example and emulation of all. You, Signor Prospero, come in for your share, and the Government has already contemplated decorating you with the cross."

"Me?"

"To be sure. Was not our Signor Prospero captain of the National Guard?"

"Which was never called out."

"That is not your fault, Signor Prospero, but that of former Ministers, who have never thought of raising the prestige of this institution in Castelnuovo Bedonia. In my opinion, as Government officer, you have been captain for more than ten years. You have,

therefore, a right to the cross of knighthood. And that is not all."

"Not all!" said Signor Prospero, perplexed betwixt doubt and fear.

"Not all," repeated the Sub-Prefect. "You made a speech at the Agricultural Congress at Collemezzo."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Signor Prospero modestly. "It was only to say that I would have planted wheat instead of sorrel and potatoes instead of beetroot."

"Capital! By this you demonstrated the solidity of your reasoning. Not everything is to be changed in this world," the Sub-Prefect condescended to acknowledge, "and there are ancient customs to which we must hold fast, because they are supported by experience. If our ancestors from time immemorial have been faithful to the cultivation of the potato—that is, not from time immemorial, because the potato is relatively modern; in short, Signor Prospero, experience teaches

us, and you represent experience, that it is necessary to be constant to the preservation of ancient systems. A Conservative party, wisely Conservative, is also necessary to maintain the equilibrium in a well-organised state. In politics as in mechanics everything is well balanced, and I shall not omit saying so in the Senate."

"Indeed!" cried Signor Prospero. "In the Senate? and when?"

"When I go there," replied the Sub-Prefect, descending from the heights of his ambition. "But to return to ourselves. You are an agriculturist, Signor Prospero. Italy has need of agriculturists. Have you not read Virgil? *Salve magna parnes frugum Saturnia tellus.* There is a fine epigraph for the head of a pamphlet which I advise you to write."

This entirely novel idea of an agrarian treatise suggested to him by the Sub-Prefect was not very attractive to worthy Signor Prospero, in spite of the epigraph.

"Upon my honour," he said, "I should not know how to set about it."

"With goodwill, my friend, and the rest will come of itself. Read some book on agriculture; it will brush up your ideas. I have learned a great deal from *Segreti di Don Rebo*, by Ottavi, a golden book which has assisted me to improvise four speeches. You must understand, Signor Prospero, that agriculture is not my line. On the contrary, I am wholly a politician. Read Ottavi; he is a mine of wealth. Put together half-a-dozen principles of science by way of preface to the maxims of your subject, and you will see. As Captain of the National Guard you have a right to the cross of knighthood; as agriculturist you will receive that of official."

"The Commendatore is still a long way off," observed Signor Prospero, laughing.

"Not at all; let us make up this match which the Minister has so much at heart, for the reasons I have had the honour of ex-

plaining to you, and you will immediately receive the collar."

"I see; it would be a reward for a happy intermingling of races."

"You are very witty, Commendatore; I congratulate you."

"Oh, with you, Signor Prefect, who could help being so?"

"Well, do have a little of my ardour, and bring this business to a satisfactory conclusion."

"I will do all I can, be sure of that. If Italy is to benefit by this marriage, I shall not be behindhand. But remember, Signor Sub-Prefect, I am only guardian and uncle. I can advise, assist, protect, but the young man, on his side, must"—

"He will do his duty, never fear. We will all do our duty so that the Minister may be pleased, and his deep design realised. We will put forward the Duke of Francavilla, we will make him shine. And, in the mean-

while, let us find our way back to the Hall. Our cigars are finished, and no one must suspect that we two have important matters to discuss."

"You are right; let us go."

And Signor Prospero Gentili, maternal uncle and guardian to Signorina Adéle Ruzzani, a romantic girl, as I have said, and a millionaire, as you will have guessed, threw the end of his cigar from the balcony to the courtyard below, then followed Cavaliere Tiraquelli, Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia into the reception-room.

The usual dancing had not yet begun, although the Professor of Music had already tantalised the ladies and gentlemen with the preliminary chords of a valse. But before relating the reason of this delay it is necessary to give you some idea of the Hall. It shall not be a picture, merely a sketch.

By the side of the Sub-Prefectess, on the red velvet sofa, which was the pontifical

throne, the sancta sanctorum and all that you can imagine of most solemn therein, sat Countess Gamberini, a plump, red-faced woman, forming a contrast to and compensation for the other, who was withered and sallow. Three or four of the most venerable ladies of Castelnuovo were seated in arm-chairs near the sofa, forming a circle round the two greater divinities. As many men, wearing medals, formed accompaniment to the women. They were the leading personages in Castelnuovo, the Mayor, the Senior Justice on the bench, the Notary, a retired Magistrate. It seemed like one of those conclaves of gods which the ancient Romans used to assemble in an elevated part of the triclinium, in order to have the gods as witnesses and patrons of their banquets. If you object to this pagan simile, suppose the sofa to be a Christian altar. The Sub-Prefect would be the priest, now leaning on one arm of the sofa, *in cornu epistolae*, where his wife

was seated, now on the other, *in cornu evangelii*, where was Countess Gamberini, while he celebrated the sacred rites and furnished the word of command to the faithful.

Farther off, close to an enormous console table, above which towered an ancient mirror in a carved gilt frame, was assembled a more lively party in spite of an abundance of grey heads. The Recorder, an excellent person, frequenter of the comic opera, was talking to his colleagues about mortgages, customs, weights and measures, intermingled with anecdotes of his youth, and some discreet allusions to the noble bottle. These were the men who were busy the whole blessed day at their office, but dismissed it from their minds as soon as the office was closed.

Near the pianoforte, on the other side of the room, was another and more numerous assembly of young men. It was ruled by Signora Morselli with all the authority her

forty years bestowed upon her. She was an estimable woman, possessing only one fault, that of imagining herself to be a flowing soprano. She qualified it, however, by never singing unless asked over and over again. And she was asked repeatedly, if for no other reason than from a sentiment of gratitude, because her presence gave all the young people of both sexes an excellent pretext for keeping away from the sober persons who offered incense around the throne of red velvet.

Among that group of young people, lovers of music, the young Countess Gamberini condescended to remain longer than anywhere else. There were to be seen the few beaux of Castelnuovo, dandies more or less elegant, who flitted from the pianoforte to a round table on which were placed, round a *Carcel* lamp which stood in an imitation Chinese vase, the albums, gifts, newspapers, and other curiosities at which Adele Ruzzani

glanced from time to time. Berta Gamberini and Adele Ruzzani were the two poles of that little world. The two magnetic poles, you must understand, and not those of the earth which, cold as they are, and surrounded by ice, accumulated for thousands of years, would not serve as a parallel when we are describing youth which we love, and beauty which stirs our blood.

To say the truth, Berta was not a beauty to drive men to distraction. Besides she was too serious, too stately, and this, if it added to her aristocratic mien, spoilt her expression. In it was visible the haughtiness of five generations of Gamberinis; and one could feel the condescension with which, at her friends' request, she touched the keys of the pianoforte.

Adele Ruzzani was more beautiful, more attractive, and, according to circumstances and caprice, more agreeable. Yet, there were some eccentricities to be overlooked. Adele

Ruzzani wore her hair short, cut just below the ear like a little mediæval page. Some liked the novelty, others did not; her friends maintained that Adele's hair had been cut off when she was a child, and that it had never grown since. But certainly Adele Ruzzani's coiffure was a whim. Whether or not people liked it, that short fair hair which trembled at every movement of her head, was very becoming to her sprightly figure. Adele Ruzzani, moreover, did not care much about music; she only danced by way of condescension, and never would talk of fashions. She was devoid of feminine tastes; she liked serious conversation, though she did not object to varied subjects, often rambling from one subject to another; sometimes she lamented her ignorance of Greek and Latin, and declared that she would learn both languages at the first opportunity. Needless to say the opportunity never came. That bewitching little vixen had no time for any-

thing of that kind, nor did she care about it two days running.

In spite of these defects, which will appear great or small according to the way of looking at them, the young men formed a circle round Signorina Adele. They did not always feel at their ease with her, for she seemed to laugh at them, and would abandon them without paying attention to their madrigals in order to enter into some discussion on law or politics. Yes, indeed, even politics, which is the height of abomination.

"Oh, why not leave these discussions to the men?" they asked one another sometimes when they saw Adele growing enthusiastic over these intellectual problems.

A vain question, the result of a foolish sentiment. For my part, I could wish that certain discussions with which we men vex ourselves, were indeed usurped by women. When I hear a beautiful daughter of Eve reason on politics, may God forgive me, but

I should like to embrace her. Here, I say to myself, here is someone who delights in digesting this tough morsel!

Adele Ruzzani was then a capricious maiden. But, I repeat, she drove no one away. What is not permitted to a couple of millions, when clothed in petticoats? You may abuse these millions, desire to see them divided in little sixpenny pieces which could be shared by all, according to the most accurate calculations, if the division were made equally, from the first of the levellers to the last of the levelled; but all the time these two millions command respect and fascinate the eye.

You may play the philosopher, turn up your nose, go away, but you will always succumb in the end, even swearing the while that it is for the love of two beautiful eyes, of two blooming cheeks, and so on. The fact remains that you think much more of *that* beauty than of these which are placed on

a lower pedestal, and you seem to wish to discover the reason of certain golden reflections in the cavity of the eye and the hollow of the cheek.

It remains to be said that you must be wary and not show yourself in your true colours. Girls in general are sharp, and those who are rich, especially, are suspicious. Even without a thought of such a thing on your part, you may, by them, be looked upon as a fortune hunter.

And the Duke of Francavilla, on his side, was artful. The young amateur of prehistoric archæology was equally interested in all the social strata of Castelnuovo. He courteously paid his respects to the venerable ladies; then, without appearing to do so, he mixed with the young people, taking a seat between two parties, placing himself at the equator, between the two poles, now chatting with Signorina Adele, now with Berta, the young Countess, speaking to one of music, to

the other of travels. Just then Berta delighted in discussing Richard Wagner; Adele, New Guinea. And the Duke went from Lohengrin to Papuas with that ease and dexterity which in the speaker is admirable, and which arouses envy in those who listen.

Not even for Signorina Adele and Countess Berta were the rest forgotten. Nobly did the Duke of Francavilla repay the hospitality of Castelnuovo. He was courteous to all; at the slightest hint he would change the subject; like those paper butterflies invented by the Japanese, he fluttered here and there at every breath, without ever touching the ground. Prodigious Duke! To think that that young man, one of the first gentlemen of Italy, should be there hidden among rural surroundings, occupying his mornings in excavating the floors of caves, and his evenings in displaying his talents in a Sub-Prefect's room!

Apropos, and where have we left our

excellent Sub-Prefect? A man like him should not be neglected. We must not forget that he is the most important person in Castelnuovo Bedonia.

Our Cavaliere Tiraquelli had re-entered the reception-room with trusty Signor Prospero Gentili, whose frank, beaming face seemed already illumined by the warm rays of a collar of the Crown of Italy. The future Commendatore had made a semicircle to the left to join the sober men in the conclave of the gods round the red velvet sofa, where the hostess and Countess Gamberini were resplendent with their own light. The Sub-Prefect had made a semicircle to the right towards the group of lively people; he had listened with good-humoured gravity to one of the Recorder's jokes, then, like a sovereign facing about through the ranks of courtiers he had approached the piano, where the Duke of Francavilla was displaying his wit.

"Welcome, my Lord Duke. What are you talking about?"

"Ah, yes, you have just arrived at the right moment, Cavaliere," said the Duke, laughing. "Here is a good joke. You possess a wonder in your province, and till now I had heard nothing of it."

CHAPTER III.

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia composed his lips into a smile half-subtle and half-silly, which was just suitable to the particular state of a man, who, for official reasons, ought to guess on the spur of the moment, yet who would not object to a little assistance.

"A wonder!" he exclaimed, drawing nearer and trying to gain time.

"Pardon me," replied the Duke of Francavilla; "in your province wonders are numerous, there are even more than the seven of which ancient history boasts," he added, giving a rapid glace all round as though he would distribute the compliment amongst all his fair listeners. "But I was speaking of a mediæval wonder, of an eccentricity, of an anachronism—in short, to call things by their right names, of the convent of fools."

"Ah!" answered the Sub-Prefect, breathing again, "and has your Grace found your way up there?"

"To be sure; the amateur of pre-historic archæology sacrificed a day in order to satisfy his curiosity. I have seen the convent of fools, and also shared with its inmates the cup of friendship."

The Duke of Francavilla did not imagine he had done a very wonderful thing. He thought so, however, when he saw everyone pressing close up to him, like so many children whom you tell of having been to the three golden mountains or the trees of the sun.

"Do tell us all about it, Duke!" they said. "It is not an easy matter to enter the convent of fools."

"Indeed?"

"Certainly not, and you may consider yourself fortunate. Inquisitive people are strictly denied admittance."

"Is what people say of it true?" asked Adele Ruzzani.

"Signorina," replied the Duke, "I really am quite in the dark as to what people do say of it."

"That there are men in that convent who are disgusted with the world."

"Like all monks, Signorina."

"Who let their beards grow down to their waists," added Signora Morselli.

"And they dig their graves like the Carthusians," urged the young Countess Berta.

"My dear ladies, I have seen nothing of the kind," replied the Duke of Francavilla. "I found ordinary people with ordinary beards, some also without beards. I understand they are disgusted with the world by the fact of their choosing a monastic life. However, it did not seem to me that they hate all men, for they received me extremely well without knowing who I was, and they allowed me to go away without inquiring."

"Their antipathy is only for the fair sex," observed the Sub-Prefect.

"What horrid creatures!" cried Signora Morselli.

"Well," continued the Sub-Prefect, "they hate all young people. To find favour in their eyes one must be of a certain age."

Signora Morselli, who wished to be numbered amongst the young people, turned up her nose more than ever.

"But how comes it that your Grace was up there?" resumed the Sub-Prefect, cutting short his dialogue with Signora Morselli.

"Oh, the most natural thing in the world. I found myself there almost before I was aware of it. I got up early this morning, and was going to my favourite work in the cave of La Ripa, when I heard on the opposite side the noise of stones detaching themselves and tumbling down the rocks. I looked up. At first I thought I recognised a dog, but his walking cautiously along such a strange path made me suspicious."

"A wolf, perhaps?" said Signora Morselli, pretending to shiver slightly with fear.

"No, a fox. I was not long discovering this when I observed his long, bushy brush. I was carrying my gun, but the distance was too great, and I did not trust myself to hit him. A peasant who was behind me with a burden on his shoulders said—

"'Look here, if you want to catch him, I can show you his kennel, which is there.'

"And he pointed to a rock, surmounted by five or six crooked pine trees, about five hundred yards from where the fox was standing.

"'Will you accompany me?' I asked him.

"'Just now only half way,' he answered; 'but if you will wait till I have left this parcel at the Abbey I will go with you as far as the kennel.'

"I did not know there was an Abbey in that neighbourhood, and inquired what monks they were.

"'They are not monks,' said the peasant, 'though they dress like monks. The priest says they are wolves in sheep's clothing; the people call them fools.'

"'And what do you think of them?'

"'That they may be fools, but that certainly they are not wolves, and do not go about in sheep's clothing, for they wear tunics just like friars.'

"The whole thing seemed strange to me. I let the fox escape and questioned the peasant, hoping to draw from him some information about this convent of friars who were not friars, of wolves who were not wolves, and of fools who might be much more sensible than many so-called wise men. But the peasant had told me all he knew. He was not acquainted with the inhabitants of the convent; he had only seen two or three of them from a distance, and he only held communication with the lay brother. He could not describe anything to me, not even the

monks' dress, whether it was marked by any peculiarity which resembled one order or distinguished it from another. And I, inquisitive like—a man, made up my mind to go with him to the convent gate, all the more willingly because, according to him, it was all in the way to the fir trees where was the fox's kennel. Instead, however, I was going farther away from my fossil cave, but this could wait. Here am I then, ladies and gentlemen, on the way to the convent of fools. You pass a little torrent, enter a valley, descend, ascend, then descend again, till you come to a massive bridge built only on one arch, which leads to a square tower with its loop-holes below, its battlements above, and the turrets on the top, like every tower which has any self-respect."

"Good heavens, how well he describes!" murmured Signora Morselli. "One seems to see it all!"

The Duke of Francavilla's modesty did not allow him to appear as though he had heard the flowing soprano's aside.

"On the other side of the bridge," he continued, "a dense clump of ash trees and green oaks hid the path. What peace reigned there! At the sight alone of that dark green hollow I understood monastic life, and for five minutes I envied the holy men who lived there unknown to the world."

"Until the suppression of the monasteries," remarked the Sub-Prefect, "the hermitage of San Bruno was sold ten years ago."

The ladies signified a wish to hear the continuation of the narrative, and the Duke proceeded—

"Having entered the porch, accompanied by the peasant, I saw the lay brother, a jolly fellow with a treble chin, round as a tub, but still young, and with two little black eyes which were never still. He tried to look grim, but could not succeed.

"'What does this gentleman want?' he asked the peasant.

"'He is a sportsman, and would like to rest a little while.'

"'Moreover, desires a glass of wine I expect.'

"'Father,' I answered, 'it is too early.'

"'Nonsense! Morning or evening, it is always time to drink.'

"'I agree with you on condition that one eats something also.'

"The brother looked at me with compassion.

"'All philosophers are not of this opinion,' he replied. 'Anaxagoras demands that wine should only be drunk *post prandium*. Zeno, on the contrary, maintains that *potum semper juvabit*.'

"I was anxious to emulate this facetious erudition, and made answer—

"'Both agree in confuting the doctrine of Thales.'

"'Indeed!' he contested, in a tone half surly, half pacified, 'and what does Thales say?'

"'*Acqua optima rerum.*'

"'To wash one's face once a week. I do not deny it.'

"'Father, I bow to your tolerance. The world was more severe than you, and condemned Thales' system to oblivion.'

"These words produced a smile from the friar, who said to me—

"'Come and breakfast at the convent.'

"In any other circumstances I should have declined with thanks, but this opportune pretence for visiting a convent of fools was not to be neglected, and thanking him I accepted. Signor Recorder, would you not have done the same? In the meantime I examined my friend so round and jovial, with his snuff-coloured tunic ragged and covered with stains. The illusion was complete; I had before me a real lay friar. Having dismissed

the peasant and taken charge of the bundle, the brother beckoned me to follow him. The way was longer than I thought at first when I saw the thick clump of green oaks and ash trees. My strange companion asked me if I was a native of the country, and I noted the air of satisfaction on his rubicund face as soon as I had declared myself a stranger who had come to Castelnuovo to study.

"'The prior is charming,' he said to me, 'and would also be hospitable if it were not that visitors always come out of curiosity; they want to know who we are, and why we live this retired life.'

"'I should not like to intrude,' I hastily replied.

"'Oh, no, don't mention it,' answered the lay brother. 'You are a student, therefore not one of the curious.'

"I could not help thinking that the distinction was very arbitrary, but I said nothing, reflecting that the student was a

good mask for any curiosity, and that thus I should be able to reach that blessed convent. The road skirted a rivulet, but gradually descended the side of a hill. Here and there, at equal distances, were erected shrines, corresponding to the stations of the *Via Crucis*. On the adjacent heights one could catch glimpses of the roofs of the hermitages. At last, having turned a corner between the two hills, a valley bearing some signs of cultivation displayed itself to my view, and in the midst stood a large building."

"The Convent of San Bruno," said the Sub-Prefect, taking advantage of a pause in the narrative. "It was sold for eight thousand francs; and one lot of trees alone fetched fifty thousand."

"Was it sold to the new friars?"

"No; to certain speculators who had bought the hermitage, and they re-sold it to the new friars, to the fools as they are called in the country."

"Fools, indeed!" exclaimed Signora Morselli. "The idea of hating women. Did one ever hear of such a thing?"

"And how many are they?" asked Adele Ruzzani, who did not like all these interruptions.

"Nine just now, but five are expected."

"Charming, these novices!" exclaimed the Sub-Prefect.

"Go on about the enemies of women!" continued Signora Morselli. "And you, Cavaliere, will you not force them to be suppressed?"

"Signora, tell me how it is to be done. They are authorised by all the laws of the State. They are not a community of monks, as in the olden days; they are a society of friends who live together, and do not ask to be recognised as a rational institution. That would make it complete! A rational institution that den of celibates!"

"Den of celibates! Capital! Just as one

says a den of thieves," cried the Duke of Francavilla, giving a glance all round, which without appearing to show any preference, was meant to comprise Adele.

"The den must be destroyed," began Signora Morselli again, playing her *rôle* of mamma willingly. "Signor Cavaliere, we must think about it."

"Well, let us think about it," said the Sub-Prefect with an air of condescension, qualified by a smile and a shrug of his shoulders. "If Parliament thinks fit to vote a law against celibacy, doubt not that I will set to work at once with half-a-dozen Carabineers. Signor Prospero, you will assist me by calling out the National Guard."

"I propose another plan," put in the Recorder. "The monks of San Bruno are fourteen. Let us go with the Mayor and fourteen marriageable girls."

"Happy thought!" cried Signora Morselli. "It remains to be seen whether the girls of

Castelnuovo condescend to go all that way for fourteen idiots. Of course they are also hideous."

"No, my dear madam," answered the Duke of Francavilla; "I saw them in the refectory, and"—

"*Apropos*, do go on with your story, Duke. You left off— Where did you leave off?"

"I was in sight of the convent. But the remainder of the journey may be suppressed without injury to the lucidity of the narrative."

"No, no, we will hear all, to the end of the chapter. We will not excuse you one comma."

"I understand," said the Duke, laughing. "You will not permit me to make a full stop."

"Begin, I entreat you, without commas or full stops," cried that pleasant person, the Recorder.

"I obey," replied the Duke of Francavilla,

bowing. "From the turning where we stopped, up to the convent, there are perhaps a thousand steps, and the road gradually descends till you reach it. One would not have thought that in so mountainous a district was hidden a valley, I might almost say a hollow so gently inclined. Ah, this is not what you want, ladies? Then consent to my plan; let us take the shortest way, and go straight to the convent. It is built just like any other, has a large door, passage and parlour; frescoes, representing saints, on the walls, and the miracles of San Bruno in the crescents, between the wide cornices of the walls and the small arches of the ceiling; a courtyard, with a portico all round it, the well in the middle, and herbs all round the well. I am mistaken, not herbs, they have planted flowers. And these flowers set me thinking. Why should there be flowers in a convent of fools? Is it not a community of women haters? Now where women are not

liked, what is the use of flowers? I cannot imagine, and leave the problem to cleverer brains than mine. I will only mention one thing which may perhaps enlighten students. The lay brother told me that the prior did not like garlic, and could barely tolerate parsley in omelets."

"Continue, Duke—continue."

"Ladies, I am at your orders. Going further, accompanied by the lay brother, I met a monk dressed exactly like my companion, but much cleaner in appearance. He seemed to me a man about forty, but perhaps the gravity of his countenance made him look older. He took no notice of me, except to return my salutation with a slight bow.

"'Father Anselmo,' the lay brother said to him, bowing.

"'Brother Giocondo,' replied the other.

"Thus I knew that the lay brother's name was Giocondo (Jovial) a fine name and well suited to the owner.

"'Who is this Father Anselmo?' I asked.

"'He is the librarian,' answered the brother.

"'The deuce he is! Is not the library in the cellar?'

"'Indeed, I wish they had more wine and fewer books! But they prefer being wells of science, to filling themselves with such a good thing, and they have a very extensive library.'

"Farther on we met another.

"'Father Bonaventura,' said the brother, bowing as before.

"'Brother Giocondo,' replied the other, and went on.

"'And who is this?' I asked.

"'The astronomer.'

"'What! you have also an observatory?'

"'Of course, and a chemical laboratory and other devilries. Once a week the fathers assemble in the chapter-house and compare their studies in common.'

"'Capital! And will they publish a journal?'

"'They have thought of doing so,' answered brother Giocondo, 'but hitherto they have not been numerous enough to start even a printing press. Soon they will be fourteen, and then they will print the "Scientific Journal."'

"'It is sure to be interesting, and I should like to read it.'

"'I think that will be difficult; they intend printing merely fifteen copies; one for each, and one for the library. At least so I have heard.'

"I was dumbfounded. They may, or may not be mad, I thought; but certainly they are very peculiar. I followed the lay brother; saw the church which had been transformed into a library; then I went into the chapter-house, which has seats all round, just as in the time of the Camaldolesian friars, with the addition of some shelves in the middle for the

scientific, literary, and artistic reviews from all parts of Europe. San Bruno blesses everything, from the medallion in the ceiling."

CHAPTER IV.

THE circle round the Duke of Francavilla had become serious during the process of his narrative.

"It is renouncing the world without leaving it," observed the most sententious of all the Sub-Prefects in the kingdom.

"It is, indeed, thus that they understand it," resumed the Duke of Francavilla. "At length I saw the prior—a man about thirty-five, or rather less—with dark hair, regular features, and large, intelligent eyes, which are the more conspicuous in contrast to the pallor of his face. He also wears the snuff-coloured tunic, showing, however, the shirt collar, which breaks the monotony of the dress, and a velvet cap artistically cut out in the fashion of the middle-ages. He received me extremely well, though his scrutinising gaze betrayed a shadow of suspicion. I told him

frankly who I was; why I was at Castelnuovo, and at that moment up there. He then questioned me about the caves, excavations, and extent of my studies, which indeed is not great. It was easy to see his intention of examining me, but I pretended not to perceive it, and displayed all my scanty knowledge. I had the good fortune to please him; his face cleared, and he talked without restraint.

"'You have forestalled us,' he said; 'we also wished to undertake some researches of this kind, because here in the convent of San Bruno we wish to be competent in many things, and make a little world for ourselves.'

"'Is there not the great world?' I asked.

"'Great, yes,' he replied, 'but too troublesome with its envy, rancour, and the rest of the miseries which spoil everything. No one can live as he likes, and that would be the least evil,' he added good-humouredly, 'but

this is the misfortune, that nobody can do anyone else a service without being paid with ingratitude. Let the world attend to its own business, and let him who likes live in it. We, living in seclusion, will have all the good of the world, and eschew all the evil.'

"'Beginning with women?' I was bold enough to inquire."

"Ah, that's it!" cried the ladies. "And what did he answer?"

"At first he was silent, and looked at me fixedly. In truth I had presumed a little too far. But I had not the appearance of a man who had come there expressly to annoy my own interlocutor, but like one who wished to be enlightened by discussion. And the prior understood this, for, with a melancholy smile and shaking his head, he replied— "Wait a minute ladies, I should like to remember everything exactly. Such a fine speech!"

"Well, do not let us wait too long for this fine speech, in order to make us think it more

beautiful," cried the ladies in that tone of familiar authority which showed how much they thought of the personage they addressed.

"Have patience, I shall repeat it badly, but it will not be my fault," resumed the Duke of Francavilla.

"'Sir,' the monk said to me, 'we do not mean that. The duty of our community is not to hate women. They do not form part of our faith—part of our ideal—that is all. Do people hate diamonds just because they do not wear them?'"

"Did the prior say this?" asked Signora Morselli.

"Precisely, Signora; and it seemed to me rather delicate. Do you not think so?"

"Yes, for a man who shuns women it is not bad. Go on, I implore you."

"'This,' I said, 'is the opinion of the community; but individually what is the idea formed of women?'

"'My dear sir, personally, they are to be

avoided—they are avoided. Each one of us has come here with the second vocation. You wonder at my distinction? It is, however, a most natural one. Every man has in his youth two vocations. The first which is true or false, without our being able to discern it, which results in the tardy repentance, the rage and lengthened agonies of the cloister. Saint Anthony, a voluntary hermit in Thebes, absorbed from morning till evening in his holy meditations, was constantly seeing the devil, who assumed all the shapes of his smothered desires, and of his repressed ambition. Saint Theresa suffered indescribable torments, several times lamented her vow and the ardent mysticism of her life; and the causes of her death proved what a great sacrifice she had made, and how it was certainly beyond her strength. One cannot trust the first vocation. For this reason modern society does right in suppressing, so far as it can, all the monastic orders founded

on the indissolubility of a vow taken too early. The second is the true vocation, because it falls to the lot of a man experienced in the battles of life, and he gives himself up to it with full consciousness of right. Let no one speak evil of this vocation or oppose its legitimate affections; leave to all wounded hearts, to all deluded souls their refuge in solitude, their solace in the peace of a newly-found brotherhood.'

"'How true!' I cried.

"My exclamation pleased him, for he continued with greater earnestness—

"'You see, then, sir, we are gathered together, all of us, crushed by the same disillusions. We were three at the beginning, like the society of San Bruno, and we sympathised in our mutual sorrows. Not the sorrows one has at twenty, which are transitory like spring showers, but at thirty, which have a deeper root, and are nourished by the bitter experience of the world.'

"'Pardon me,' I interrupted, 'you now speak of sorrows caused by an unfortunate affection; but man does not live for love alone—there is ambition, powerful stimulus—there is the desire of being useful to one's fellow creatures. Politics for example'—

"He did not permit me to finish. And if I were—were not afraid of offending our good Sub-Prefect—"

"Say what you like!" replied Cavaliere Tiraquelli, to whom this rhetorical suspension was dedicated.

"Well," resumed the Duke of Francavilla, "according to my interlocutor, politics and the desire of doing good to one's fellow-creatures are so many vexations of the spirit."

"'It is true,' he said, 'that at a certain age, man begins to feel these philanthropic impulses, to be counsellor to the Commune, deputy-administrator of good works, member of an agricultural board, Captain of the National Guard'"—

"Signor Prospero," said the Sub-Prefect, not without reason interrupting the Duke of Francavilla, "this is meant for us."

"On the contrary, wholly for me," answered Signor Prospero. "But I do not complain. Continue Duke—continue."

The Duke of Francavilla was at first a little disconcerted, but he quite understood that the Sub-Prefect wished to offer him a pretext for correcting the speech made by the prior of San Bruno.

"It is not I, but the prior who speaks," he said, *relata refero*; "and ambassadors never suffer; am I not right, Signor Gentile?"

"I have already said so; pray go on."

"I was Captain of the National Guard so short a time that the verdict of this prior of fools could not possibly concern me. Besides, I have repented of my ambition," added Signor Prospero with pleasant hypocrisy "and without the need of turning friar."

"I return then, with my mind at rest, to

the prior of San Bruno," resumed the Duke of Francavilla."

"'It is precisely in politics,' he said, 'that man meets with his worst disappointments. What are politics and what is the nature of man's passion for public affairs? For some it is satisfaction of personal vanity, or a mercenary gain; for others, outburst of patriotism, a most noble sentiment in everyone. I leave the first, who do not deserve even our indignation, and attend only to the second. What gratification do they receive? What righteous satisfaction do they derive from the time and talents they expend, from the vexations they endure? The conviction of having done a useless work, besides being mistrusted, and then, I ask, how have you the courage to advise an honest man to remain in his office which is no sinecure, which hinders nothing and from which he himself will be turned out? Have you ever observed' added the prior, 'the course of a river on a day when

the waters are very high? Branches, trunks of trees, everything that has fallen in the way of the invading torrent, is borne rapidly away on the surface. A bough, a twig, what you will, is slowly removed from the right path. A whirlpool has altered its course. A wave has sent it out of the way, and that bough, that twig wavers for an instant and is then carried away. It has many companions in the current of the river; several, as though attracted by an irresistible force, return to the middle to be buffeted by the waves; others are driven farther and farther away and succeed in seizing the moment in which the water, repelled by the flood, is motionless thus offering to these boughs, these twigs, a refuge, as shelter. I have always thought that these twigs possess a soul, the consciousness and the will not to be subverted by the current.'

"'Excuse me,' I interrupted, 'but stagnant water is turbid, running water alone is limpid.'

"'You mean that my parallel is not correct,' replied the prior smiling. 'Be it so. Reverse it; suppose that the turbid is in the midst of the running water, or the limpid water on each side. Or see nothing in the parallel but tumult and calm.'"

"Good gracious, what a pompous discourse, just to tell you that they have followed Cato's Maxim *rumores fuge*, and that they hate the world!" exclaimed the recorder.

"No, my dear sir;" answered the Duke of Francavilla, "strictly speaking they do not hate the world. On this subject as on that of women, they have their capricious ideas.

"'The world is not bad,' is exactly what the prior said; 'to think so, is an error on the part of those who are imbued with the suicidal mania. The world is that which it is, a mixture of good and evil, the evil or good predominating according to the disposition and circumstance of him who judges. On every side the world has some joy, some consolation to offer, just as it gives life to every

social class. For in whatever condition he is placed, a wise man measures the *pros* and *cons* for his participation therein, not indeed with the eyes of the egotist, who takes care of himself, but with those of the philanthropist who desires to do everything for the benefit of others, and he does so when the occasion offers, without thinking of any hope of reward or vexing himself if this proves fallacious; he does it, above all, because he assists his fellow creature, and only in a case when he is persuaded he is doing good. Amongst all hardships the only one of importance is uselessness. And man, ruling himself in this manner, passionless, free from weaknesses and vain lamentations, seeks to secure his share of happiness. Do you not see Cincinatus cultivating his fields before and after the repeated honours of the Consulate, the dictatorship and the interregnum? Scipio Africanus is indeed inexcusable for having retired too late to the solitude of Liternus to digest

the bitter pills his fellow citizens made him swallow. Had he gone there sooner, they would not have thought him proud or arrogant, they would not have called him a thief, or little less, as they did with great animosity in the public assembly, and he cultivating flowers on the shores of his lake, a voluntary and benevolent exile would not have died mad.'

"Thus, ladies, spoke the prior of San Bruno with great kindness and devoid of that dogmatic tone which in my epitome of his words I have been obliged to give to the discourse."

"Your Grace will confess," observed the Sub-Prefect, "that you are enamoured of the speech, and also of the orator."

"Yes; I will not deny it. I have found good both in the one and the other. And then that courteous reception in the refectory put me in good humour, and made even that pack of fools appear civil and endurable."

"Are we then to hail a new monk of San Bruno?" asked Signor Morselli.

"If you are speaking of me, I think not" answered the Duke, "I have quite other ideas in my head."

"And quite other employments await you in the world," added the Sub-Prefect seriously, glancing at Signor Prospero, future Commendatore.

"I am not ambitious" replied the Duke modestly; "but since the world has done me no harm, and I have no cause to shun the fair sex which is so courteous in giving me its attention at the present moment, I will not become a monk, I promise. I only say that even up there one could very well live for a few weeks. These monks' design is to have all the necessaries of life in their convent, and also many things that are superfluous, but which greatly contribute towards the embellishment of life, and the improvement of the mind. In short they fashion for themselves a little world

within the great one, and shut themselves up in it."

"And will nothing of the misery of the great world," enquired the Sub-Prefect with his usual acumen, "obtain access to the little one."

"I should say not, Cavaliere. Their theory, as I have had the honour of telling you, is founded on the seriousness of the second vocation. Men tried in the battles and wearied with the vanities of life, withdraw into the desert, carrying with them nothing but the desire of peace. What trifling ambition could vex them in their retirement, if they have renounced all idea of greatness? Ariosto has placed discord in a convent of monks. But these have sworn not to admit her on any conditions. As soon as the five companions they expect have arrived, the prior, to set a good example, will convoke the chapter, in order to resign his office, accepted *pro tempore* and with the sole intention of directing his order."

"And is this prior a handsome young man?" asked Signora Morselli.

"Very attractive," replied the Duke.

"And why has he taken refuge up there? What disappointments could he have had?"

"My dear lady, I would willingly have asked him, but feared he would think me indiscreet. They do not like inquisitive people up there, so I was obliged to keep my wish to myself."

"And what are the other monks like?"

"Some are good-looking, some plain, some young, others middle-aged. There are monks to suit all tastes."

"Oh, let them keep to themselves," cried Signora Morselli. "No woman will lament their escape from the world. Though," she added, "one ought to find the means of making them repent. This resolution of theirs seems to me a *bonâ fide* challenge, and you, Cavaliere, ought to accept it."

"I will consider it," said the Sub-Prefect,

gravely, "something certainly might be done. For indeed you are right, Signora; here we have the beginning of a bad example. No one may withdraw from the obligations of social life; it is a canon of civil philosophy. We are all mental or manual labourers. A well organised society cannot permit these desertions, and a wise government should turn all its authority towards remedying it. These attempts to rebel against the moral law, though not expressly prohibited by the code, ought to be repressed by the right which is given by the spirit, if not by the letter of the code. The man who stands aloof resembles the idle workman who delays the completion of the public work. Woe to those nations in whom this evil desire of living apart begins to show itself, for this is the commencement of degeneration! To abandon the paths of beneficial association, because of the few or many sorrows which must be endured, is to renounce, in anticipa-

tion, the honour and fruit of useful beginnings, in which there is scope for every kind of work; to deny the vigilant wisdom of government which is omniscient, which punishes and rewards when needful, and has compensation also for virtue ill-rewarded. This," concluded the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia, "at least is my opinion."

And he vain-gloriously shut himself up in the sonorous emptiness of his phrases, leaving his audience to argue, from that little specimen, with how much babbling the world is governed.

CHAPTER V.

At this point in my narrative, I think I hear the reader exclaim, "A new monastic order in the nineteenth century! And what is worse, without even the accompaniment of a religious object, its sole purpose being separation from the world! Oh! oh!"

Kind reader, and pray why not? We are dealing with an unusual case, I allow. But, as regards follies, will not the nineteenth century perhaps be renowned as the pearl of centuries? Has it not hitherto committed more than all its revered predecessors? Think of Cabet's Icaria, the Falanstero of Saint Simon, Mormonism, Spiritism, Communism, Annhilism, and so many other attempts at cataclysm. I certainly do not wish to compare all these divine favours to a miserable convent of fools; on the contrary,

I pause to affirm that this one is of the least prominent, the most innocent, the most alluring among so many fine specimens of human insatiability which budded in the shade of the laws of nations and blossomed in the light of liberty.

But now I perceive that I am employing a figure of rhetoric, over which the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia might claim the right of priority. *Prior in tempore, potior in jure*; let us then leave rhetoric to worthy Cavaliere Tiraquelli and resume the thread of our narrative.

The Monastery of San Bruno was shortly expecting a reinforcement. The new guests were five—five the deluded souls who were urged by the second vocation—to seek peace in that nest of regular laymen, under the temporary rule of Father Anacleto. This was the name by which the prior was known. Brother Giocondo had received orders to admit the five new associates as soon as they

reached the bridge, and asked to be directed to the convent.

The same morning on which he had received this order from the prior, our lay brother opened the gates of the tower to two guests. It is true he had been told to expect five; but then it did not follow that they would all arrive at once.

"Already two," he wisely said to himself, "the others will come later."

And turning to the two visitors he asked them with a smile on his lips—

"Do you come to profess yourselves monks?"

"That is our desire," said the younger of the two, whilst the other shook his head with an air of resignation.

The two were very dissimilar in age, appearance, and expression. The young man was fair, his features good, and he was gracefully proportioned, but seemed a little ill at ease in his travelling costume. How was it

possible that, on the threshold of life, he could wish to shut himself up in a convent? What sorrows could have fallen upon him with that face of an angel from heaven, which seemed formed expressly to overcome every obstacle? And the old man, so fat, round, ruddy and shining, what could he have to complain of? Perhaps the cook had spoilt a sauce? But was that sufficient to put so bulky a person out of conceit with the world?

Alas, my readers, it is only too true that appearances are deceitful; and in the present instance they deceived more than ever.

Having exchanged the few necessary words, and paid the peasant who carried their portmanteaux, the two travellers followed the lay brother, on whom the younger of the two smiled amiably as one smiles at a familiar face in a foreign country. After entering the wood they ascended the avenue of ash trees, turned between the two hills already men-

tioned, perceived the convent in its leafy hollow, descended, and at length arrived at the parlour.

"I will inform the prior of your arrival," said brother Giocondo. "In the meanwhile your luggage shall be put in the strangers' room."

"Very well," replied the angel from heaven, and it seemed—(may the shade of Ariosto forgive me if I steal a verse from Orlando)—it seemed as though it were Gabriel saying *ave.*

Before going away the lay brother glanced at the two travellers.

"He will make a handsome little monk, upon my honour!" said he to himself. "But will the prior, who is so particular about the second vocation, accept him? We will hope that his papa has enough of it for both," he added, thinking of the elder of the new comers. "He is the man to take the post of cellarist at the first opportunity."

The parlour, like all convent parlours, was a cold, bare room. Nor had the regular laymen, who had taken the place of the Camaldolesians, thought of embellishing this part of the building; a table of nut-wood against the wall, eight chairs in a row, a frameless picture on the wall were all the furniture of the room. The picture represented Mastino II. della Scala—a man with a chestnut beard, a large fur cap on his head, the red surcoat over the coat of mail, and his face seen in profile, perhaps from a laudable design on the part of the artist to make known to posterity that this exceedingly ugly face, was not of the Grecian type. Why the devil was Mastino II. in the parlour of San Bruno? For the same reason that many ancient portraits hang in modern houses. Hereditary relics often forgotten, purchases made by an ancestor in a moment of good fortune, it often happens that their names are unknown, or if known, there is

still the doubt concerning the manner in which they have come to the house.

There was nothing to look at in that portrait, at least a hundred years younger than its original. Having seen the name of Mastino II. written in yellow letters at the bottom of the picture, according to the custom of the fourteenth century, the younger of the two travellers turned to the other, and smiling, winked as though he were laughing at him.

"Must it really be so? Shall we not turn back?" asked the other, with a melancholy air which contrasted strangely with his ruddy countenance.

The young man frowned like one who will not listen to any remarks, and is inclined to be angry.

"Uncle, I have told you, either do as I wish, or bear the consequences. Take care of yourself—there is no escape from here."

"But consider a moment," said the one

who was called uncle. "Will there not be difficulties?"

"Why, certainly, when one has to do with anybody so obstinate as you! To the Pole, no; to the Equator neither."

"But it was the project of a madman!" exclaimed the poor man.

"Then let us not go out of our way," rejoined the young man, shaking his head with an air of conscious authority; "here we are at home in the convent of fools."

One always had the worst of it with that fairhaired cherubim. The uncle followed Jacob's example when he wrestled with the angel; he gave himself up as vanquished, and raised his eyes to heaven in sign of self-sacrifice and resignation, but not till he had glanced sadly at the button-hole of his overcoat which would now be without the ribbon of Commendatore. He sighed between the two glances.

The parlour door opened, and brother

Giocondo announced the prior's arrival. Remembering that he had been Captain of the National Guard, the uncle assumed a dignified, not to say directly martial air. The nephew gaily shook his fair head, composed his lips into a malicious little smile and looked towards the entrance to receive the first impression.

There was a tinge of the ludicrous in that species of laymen who wished to appear monks. But to their honour be it said, they did not really care about that, and their indifference assumed somewhat of dignity. They lived in solitude, seeking no one ; those who went thither must take them as they were. Monks or no monks they had inscribed on the gate of the monastery, the sentence devised by Rabelais—*Fais ce que voudras*, and they did not heed anything else.

Father Anacleto, worthy prior of San Bruno, was not altogether serious and wore

his snuff-coloured habit with an aristocratic ease of manner. His beard was black and fine, whiskers rather thin and short, hair curly and shining, forehead wide, glance open, nose straight and finely cut, lips thin and red. The first feeling he awakened was one of sincere sympathy, the second one of surprise and curiosity. How was it possible that a man so young, and with such a pleasant countenance, could have embraced a mode of life which was a renunciation by anticipation of so many gay conquests? But looking at him attentively during the course of conversation, one observed some delicate lines in the forehead, which at times were drawn together in a cluster in the centre of the brow, certain sudden contractions of the lips, certain mists of sadness in the eyes, and then one understood how that man had lived a lifetime in a few years, and how the storms of life might have done much more than furrow his brow and dim his glance.

Velvet cap in hand, he extended it by way of salutation whilst he strove in one glance to take in the two visitors, and penetrate their thoughts.

"In what can I serve you, gentlemen?" he enquired after he had invited them to be seated.

The uncle opened his mouth to reply, but he could not succeed in uttering a syllable; therefore renouncing a task which he perceived to be beyond him, he turned to his nephew with a look of silent entreaty. The angel from heaven slightly shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of ill-disguised wrath, for what seemed to him egregious mental weakness and replied all in one breath—

"Sir, we are desirous of subscribing to the order of San Bruno."

The prior smiled and in a calm tone not devoid of a certain quaintness, replied:—

"To say 'San Bruno' is only a manner of speaking. But, gentlemen, do you really

know what it means? The order is perhaps somewhat farcical in form, since we are not monks, but in substance it is serious since we have a *parole d'honneur* which is as obligatory as the most solemn vow."

"We know it," replied the angel. "One comes here to live out of the world, taking no heed of its sad vanities."

"It is true," said the prior bowing, "but not the whole truth; what you say, my young sir, each of us could do for himself by living alone in the country by choice. Here, on the contrary we live united, fashioning our little world, revised and corrected, without the vexations of the great one, yet with all the good, with all the usefulness which can be found in life. We renounce those dangerous affections which leave traces of sorrow and bitterness, but we desire and we practise brotherly love which is a divine need of the heart; we renounce ambition, but we dedicate ourselves to study which refines the intellect, and is also the natural employment of the mind."

"We know it, father, and we ask permission to dedicate ourselves with you to this mode of life."

"But take care" observed the prior; "it is a higher or a lower kind of life, according to the view one takes of it, but certainly different to the general life, towards which our education and the ardour of our passions incline us. Therefore in order to avoid regret, a sincere vocation is necessary and one recognised as such, by means of comparison, which is only possible when one has lived a long time amongst men. An honest desire for peace, or a poetical aspiration for the exquisite pleasures of solitude does not suffice, the wish must go deeper and the aspiration be tried by the disillusions of life. That the world offers sorrows and afflictions, in much greater number and intensity than pleasures and consolations is now well known and may also be believed on the assurance of old men, by those who have not realised this melancholy fact for themselves. But it is

one thing to accept a maxim as true, another to conform to it all one's life. We know goodness and admire it, yet we cling to evil or return to it when it suits us. From this refuge, on the contrary, there is no turning back. Consequently we should come to it (pardon me, but I must of necessity be candid) we should come to it at a riper age than for instance, is yours."

"I am twenty-two," said the angel, boldly.

"That may be, but it is not a great age. And then you have not even a sign of down on your face."

"Excuse me, what does that matter to you?"

The prior smiled at the fair-headed boy's outburst.

"Nothing at all," he replied, "but I should not like it to be thought that I entrap minors."

"I am alone; I have no one but my uncle," rejoined the young man. "And my uncle here also desires to become a monk."

"Is it true?" asked the prior turning to the uncle.

"It is true;" replied the latter with a gesture of *et cum Spiritu tuo.*

Father Anacleto collected his thoughts for a few minutes; then raised his eyes like a man who has made up his mind, and prepares to speak. But it seemed as if the thought were difficult of expression, even for a man of his authority, because after raising his eyes, he remained a few seconds looking fixedly at the young cherubim. The latter blushed to the roots of his hair, but did not cast down his eyes.

"Will you forgive my frankness?" began the prior at length.

"Speak without ceremony."

"But mind," he added, "I wish to be candid even at the risk of appearing—uncivil."

"That you cannot be;" said the cherubim who had as yet no sign of whiskers, but already showed much discernment.

"Thanks," answered the prior, yielding and feeling he was about to yield. "I wished to say that I shall doubt, and to doubt is always rude; is it not?"

"According to the way it is expressed," replied the cherubim.

"Well then," said the prior, shrugging his shoulders, "we will adopt the mildest form. I see here two things equally to be feared, either this is a joke"—

At these words the cherubim jumped from his seat.

"It is no joke," he interrupted, eagerly; "I entreat you to believe me; I mean it on my honour. I may be mistaken; we may be mistaken," he added correcting himself immediately, "but it is our sincere desire to live here, if you do not think us unworthy. We are well-to-do people, ready to take our share of the expenses, and ready to pay the necessary premium, and more, even to live in this community of San Bruno. You say the

notion is beyond my years. What do you know about it? Excuse me, I am not yet under your tutelage. To-morrow I will recognise your authority, your jurisdiction. For to-day, at least, let me say openly what I think. What do you know about me? Suppose I have lived long enough in the world to find out that it is worth nothing, that it is deceitful, foolish and wearisome. Is not that enough to make me seek refuge up here?"

"Ah, it is not sufficient," said the prior, shaking his head and smiling. "But let us say no more. I had hinted at a doubt on my part. You are displeased, and I have no wish to recur to the subject. The fervour with which you have refuted it, tells me plainly that I must not repeat, nor even explain it."

"You ought to withdraw it altogether," replied the cherubim; "I would not for the

world allow myself a joke of this kind, above all with you."

It was nothing more than a compliment; but the tone in which it was said troubled Father Anacleto.

"There remains still the other part of the dilemma," said he, changing the subject. "Your wish then is sincere. You affirm it, and I believe you. But even a sincere desire may be of short duration."

"It will last—believe this also—it will last."

"To-day you think so, but who can be certain of the morrow? You see I am obliged to use my discretion to consider the possibility, not to say probability, that your wish, now so ardent, may one day be changed into aversion. And then? The vow now taken, the covenant made between us, would not only be regretted by you, but would wrong my penetration which would have shown itself to be very indifferent. In short,

I am prior of nine (and we shall soon be fourteen) persons, all of them people of a certain age who live in a quiet fashion. But you know how the condition of mental tranquillity is obtained, which is much more delicate and subtle than are scales to weigh gold, and how the merest trifle suffices to disturb that happy equilibrium. If one day," observed Father Anacleto, acutely fixing his penetrating eyes on the cherubim's face, "if one day people should say to me, 'Sir prior, you were a little hasty in the business of that admission,' do you not think that our beautiful harmony would thereby be disturbed, the only guarantee we have of peace, the only happiness which makes our life preferable to that of the world?"

An air of profound sadness overspread the young man's face. He looked like one of those angels in the good days of old, who, having returned to Paradise, heard the disagreeable tidings that the gate was shut.

"However," resumed Father Anacleto, grieved to have hurt his young interlocutor's feelings, "we will not pause to consider all the possible chances which may be equally improbable. You and your uncle will help me to set my conscience at rest; agree to enter as guests for the present, and let us call this hospitality a noviciate. In a year—you object? Let us then say six months? No. Then say in three we will again consider your vocation. You must understand," observed the prior, "that even after being received into the community, the bond is not indissoluble. But there is always a *parole d'honneur* which pledges; by this *parole* you are admitted; and for gentlemen the *parole* is law. If this were not so, you will understand, the Convent of San Bruno would soon be changed into an inn, and I should be the host or director *pro tempore*. Now, neither my reserved character, nor my studious habits would allow me to exercise this office."

"You are right; but we swear to you from this moment"—

"No, for heaven's sake do not swear, I will not recognise the oath, I have not heard it. Remain here, we receive you as novices. Hitherto none have been accepted; but it shall be an exception to the rule. And first of all, seeing that each one devotes himself to some sort of work, let us see what you can both do?"

"I—really," stammered the uncle, "some slight knowledge of agriculture"—

"You will find little opportunity of applying it," replied the father; "here we have nothing but the kitchen garden and the orchard; fields are altogether wanting. However the little there is, will furnish you with matter for study, and we shall be glad to have an agriculturist in our family, as we already have a botanist. And you?"

"Hardly anything," replied the cherubim, blushing. "I sing a little—the pianoforte—frivolities, you are right," he added imme-

diately, noticing an involuntary movement of Father Anacleto's lips when he heard these words.

"No, I do not say so," remarked the prior.

"You think so—it is all the same."

"Nor do I think so. Even music is an excellent thing, and a more serious one than is generally supposed. It is mathematics applied to sound, and concerns a branch of physical science which is certainly not the least important. Helmholtz has written a book which is quite the reverse of frivolous, for it completely demonstrates the phenomena of acoustics and the laws of music which are derived therefrom. Profoundly studying his art, which was precisely that of music, Herschel was, by degrees, led to the study of geometry, and thence to the knowledge of theoretical astronomy to the perfecting of the telescope, and to the discovery of Uranus. I like to remember these facts," added Father

Anacleto, who felt rather perplexed at having to converse with that strange novice, "in order to show you that even I appreciate music. Unfortunately, here we have no means of cultivating it; we have turned the church into a library and there is not even an organ."

"I can draw a little," the young man ventured to say.

"Ah, good! That is what we want," cried Father Anacleto. "Oh, do not be afraid, we shall not expect Raphael's cartoons. The elements only of drawing will suffice. We are thinking of compiling a journal, a species of 'Monthly Review,' in which to record our studies, and just what we want are pictures to illustrate it—particularly for the excavations in our caves."

"Ah! like the Duke of Francavilla!" imprudently exclaimed the uncle.

"Do you know him? He is a capital

fellow who paid us a visit. He is at Castelnuovo for certain pre-historic studies."

"For studies and other things," murmured the cherubim, who knew a good deal, even without having a trace of whiskers.

"I do not know," resumed Father Anacleto, who was prudent and never sought a quarrel. "He found us out a week ago, and spoke of nothing but his scientific researches. We also have already contemplated excavating the bony caves of Monte Acuto; but hitherto we had no one who could undertake the work. Now we shall have a student of these things amongst the five we expect this week to come and live with us. He is a learned professor, and taught at Turin. It seems that he has been injured; someone appropriated the credit of his discoveries. The government did not esteem him highly enough, and he resigned the chair. As you perceive, our recruits are all those who are disappointed and disgusted with man's baseness. We will

set the professor to work on archæology, and you will draw the discovered objects. Do you agree?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the cherubim, joyfully clapping his hands.

But he immediately repented of being so childish before the prior, who looked at him half suspiciously, half admiringly. He blushed for the third time, cast down his eyes and said—

"Pray forgive me; I am so delighted to find that I possess some slight gift which may be of use to the community."

These preliminaries being settled, Father Anacleto offered to show the new guests over the convent, and the proposal was joyfully accepted by the cherubim, who thus saw all the difficulties in the way of his entrance into that strange convent overcome.

The uncle, too, thought they had come well out of it. A prior created expressly could not have been more accommodating.

"Is he blind?" thought he, while following Father Anacleto and the fair-haired youth in their passage through all the corridors of the convent. "When he expressed that suspicion about the age, I said to myself at once, 'we are in for it now!' And how he examined him from head to foot! But then, thank heaven, he allowed himself to be deceived with such good grace! True he was answered with some spirit! It is not for the sake of saying it, but my nephew, since henceforward I must call him so, possesses a kind of eloquence which goes straight to the heart. He is not deterred by anything. He looks you full in the face, and makes you do anything he likes—even follies such as this one. But will they all be as blind and as good as Father Anacleto? This is the question."

Meanwhile the nephew was also meditating while exchanging remarks with the prior. "Has he guessed? I am afraid so.

At least he is distrustful. But he is a gentleman, and has not gone further. I like this adventure. People will blame me, but let them say what they like ; I have no account to render to anyone. And then I am with my uncle. What a man this prior is ! The Duke of Francavilla called him sympathetic ; but he seems to me more than sympathetic ; really a handsome man too, without being conscious of it, without appearing so as everyone ought to be. This is the first real man's face I have seen. Either they are all insipid, disagreeable like the Duke of Francavilla, or else hard, gruff, repulsive. What horrors ! "

I will spare you the rest. Neither will I pause to describe all that the new guests of San Bruno saw. Convents, for the most part, resemble each other in their proud, yet, at the same time, lowly simplicity, which, I think, has a great deal to do with the tenacity of feeling which makes monastic orders last so long, and causes them to survive the laws

by which they are crushed. There is a secret attraction which draws one towards the partial solitude of the cloister and that fixed architectural form which is almost invariable, except in trifling details, exercises a fascination over the modern mind which, however, has destroyed the thought from which that form sprang. The borromineskish convents and monasteries, which existed two centuries ago, have disappeared; the broad type of ancient convents has remained, and is often gladly remembered even by— Guess whom? Our soldiers who have so often been lodged in old monasteries converted into barracks.

The convent of San Bruno, like all those of the same order, has its quarters so arranged that each monk could live by himself, with his bedroom, oratory, ante-chamber and the wheel by which his frugal meal was introduced, or the empty porringer put out. But now the wheel was only used for letters and news-

papers, when the postman arrived; the bedroom was no longer so bare as in the time of the Camaldolesians. As for the oratory, each one kept there his linen clothes, and, if needful, the books he liked to have most handy. For example, brother Giocondo kept in it the works of Gattinara and Pomino, two of his favourite authors, between which he had, for some time, been divided in his affections.

The two novices were conducted to their rooms. The prior had not asked their names, but now the lay brother inquired, coming forward with the register of the order.

"True," said the cherubim, "we had forgotten to give them. Uncle, you first."

The old man took the pen and wrote the name of Prospero Gentili.

The young man with less sincerity, but equal courage, inscribed that of Adelindo Ruzzani.

CHAPTER VI.

Meanwhile what had become of Adele Ruzzani? Let us ask the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia. The worthy government officer, who is responsible for the public security throughout the whole of the province, ought to know everything. "Nothing escapes the vigilant eye of authority" was one of his favourite phrases. Now, this is what Cavaliere Tiraquelli knew. Two days after his famous conversation under the portico, he again saw his friend and interlocutor, the future Commendatore Prospero Gentili.

"Well, how are things going on?" he inquired, without giving him time to explain the reason of his early visit. "I think they are progressing. Have you noticed the eager attention with which your beautiful niece listened the other evening to the Duke of Francavilla? It is a good sign—don't you think so?"

"Yes, a good sign," repeated Signor Prospero absently.

"What? Do you not think so?" cried the Sub-Prefect, who saw there was something the matter.

"Have I said the contrary?" asked Signor Prospero, suddenly rousing himself. And he added aside—

"It would not be surprising after that little vixen made me swear!"

"No," meanwhile, answered the Sub-Prefect, "but I thought you were perhaps still a little doubtful."

"Not in the least," replied Signor Prospero. "Though to be on the safe side, it will be best to speak to you."

"Pray do so, for heaven's sake. If you do not, who will?"

"Quite true," said Signor Prospero; "quite true. I will talk to you about it as soon as we return from this trip."

"What trip!" exclaimed the Sub-Prefect. "And where to?"

"Oh! have I not told you? I came expressly to take leave of you. I really must have lost my head!"

"And where are you going?" asked the Sub-Prefect again, without caring a rap whether Signor Prospero had lost his head or not.

"To Milan with my niece. Yes, it would seem necessary," added Signor Gentili, noticing a gesture of astonishment on the part of the Sub-Prefect, "Adelina has some purchases to make"—

Cavaliere Tiraquelli was visibly disconcerted by the announcement of this excursion.

"And tell me, shall you be away long?" he inquired.

"Oh, I don't think so. It is chiefly to pay a visit to the milliner. My niece, as you know, buys everything at Milan. The jeweller is also to be interviewed, to see about re-setting all the family jewels. The

fashion is changed for jewels also, and my niece wishes all the settings to be quite modern."

The Sub-Prefect's face cleared.

"It might be a sign," he said.

"Sign of what?"

"Do you not see? This anxiety to have all the jewels renovated. My dear Signor Prospero, have you never observed that when the period of incubation approaches the chaffinch sets to work and goes about the woods pecking at the little straws so as to make her nest?"

Signor Prospero opened wide both eyes and mouth at the same time; his eyes to admire, his mouth to laugh.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed. "What a fool I am not to have thought of it. You have great penetration, Cavaliere."

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo assumed an expression suitable to the admiration of which he was the object.

"Just fancy!" added Signor Prospero mentally, "that little vixen advised me to put forward the pretext of the jewels, and her reason never struck me. But indeed women are even sharper than the devil."

"Capital; then all is going on swimmingly," said the Sub-Prefect. "I am really sorry that you must be away a week. I hope your absence will not be longer. At all events you will write to me, will you not? It will be a good way of consoling the poor Duke. Poor fellow he is over head and ears in love. Confess, my dearest Signor Prospero, that you could not find a handsomer couple, even were there no question of furthering one of his Excellency's lofty political conceptions."

"Ha, ha!" replied Signor Prospero, laughing, "I am quite of your opinion."

"You will then feel your way."

"Never fear. Although"—

"What do you mean?"

"Although after the explanation you have

given me about the jewels and the rest, it would be almost useless; don't you think so?"

"Yes; but to ensure an answer one must also provoke it. And now the sooner it is done the better. I should advise you to go straight to the point during your journey. And mind you write. As soon as you have any news send me word. If the answer is a decided yes, telegraph to the Minister. And the commenda will not be long in coming."

Signor Prospero sighed. He had never seen that precious commenda so far off as now.

The following Wednesday was cold, at least in the drawing-room at the Sub-Prefecture. The Duke of Francavilla, usually so courteous, so *empressé* with all the ladies of Castelnuovo, young or old, pretty or plain, so that no one knew who he liked best, the Duke of Francavilla very nearly betrayed himself, for he was absent in conversation, weary in the ball-room, annoyed with every-

thing. In vain did the young Countess Berta play away at the piano; he did not pay her one compliment. She too seemed put out. Her friends thought her more haughty than usual. And the Sub-Prefectess's reception suffered from all these various moods. Had it not been for the Recorder, who was always equal to the occasion, it would have seemed like a funeral.

"So pretty Adele is gone away?" asked Countess Gamberini of the Sub-Prefectess, seated on that red damask sofa, with which my readers are acquainted.

"Yes, she is gone to Milan to do some shopping."

"A marriage in prospect?"

"Ah!" answered the Sub-Prefectess, saying neither yes nor no.

"I don't know of any *parti* for her here," resumed the Countess, feeling her way.

"Nor I," replied the Sub-Prefectess. "But perhaps there is a proposal from elsewhere."

Either the Sub-Prefectess had not been let into her husband's secret, or she was mistress of the art of dissimulation. Countess Gamberini could get nothing more out of her.

Meanwhile, sure of his game, the Sub-Prefect awaited Signor Prospero's letter. The same day on which the future Commendatore had been to take leave, before accompanying his niece to Milan, he wrote this confidential letter to the Minister :—

"I have the honour of informing your Excellency, that the affair is progressing most favourably. The Duke of Francavilla has made the campaign of Cæsar : *veni*, *vidi*, *vici*. To-day the young lady has left for Milan, where she will remain at the utmost a week. The special and most reliable information I have received, enables me to tell you that she intends having all her family jewels reset. This is, as your Excellency will perceive, an excellent sign of her intentions. Besides, the young lady's uncle and guardian

is delighted to further this alliance, and I trust that your Excellency will be pleased to reward the zeal of this worthy citizen, who has so willingly entered into the wishes of the best minister (I say it without adulation, and with my habitual candour) that Italy has ever possessed. Meanwhile I have permitted him to have a glimpse of the commenda. His claims for the two highest dignities would be : ten years of voluntary service as captain in the National Guard, for the cross of knighthood, assistance rendered in the Agricultural Congress, and the knowledge analogous to it, for that of official. Concerning the result of our negotiations, I hope shortly to send you a report, and to show myself worthy of the favours your Excellency has condescended to promise me."

Three days after, the Minister replied in his own hand-writing—

"My Dear Cavaliere,

"Do not be afraid, I will provide for

Gentili, as you justly propose. For yourself, do your duty as heretofore. We are working for a noble object. In this business, at first sight of so little moment, there is more importance than you, who are already so penetrating, are aware. Persevere, hasten matters and send me good news; I will do the same by you."

"I am Commendatore and Prefect!" exclaimed Cavaliere Tiraquelli, as soon as he had finished reading.

The Sub-Prefectess, who was present at that outburst of genuine satisfaction, immediately raised her eyebrows.

"What do you mean? Are we to leave Castelnuovo?"

"Yes, Erminia; yes, my little Erminia; but not just yet. Everything takes time. Doubt not that within the year, you will be Prefectess. And Senatrice in addition. Because, you know, one thing leads to another. To be Prefect and not Senator,

would seem to me incongruous. What are Prefects, if not the supporters of the administration of the kingdom? And Senators, what are they? The supporters of the legislation. Now, no one can be a good legislator, if he has not proved himself a good administrator. The inference to be drawn from thence, seems to me—well I will tell you the reason of this connection," continued the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo, when alone in his office. "Administration, gentlemen—a wise administration, is a legislation applied—as the legislation, a wise legislation—is a studied administration. And in order that the labour of administration may proceed regularly, it is necessary—*porro unum est necessarium* that the legislative work be prepared for a practical purpose, eminently practical. This necessity has never been attended to; and it has been the error from which all other errors have sprung. The organism

of a State—very fine this organism of the State," observed the Sub-Prefect, pausing, as if to admire his own work—"ought also to be renewed. The organism of a State, gentlemen, is like a well-planned system for the distribution of water, which having reached the source from whence the motive powers emanate, divides itself into a hundred canals, to impart the benefits of life to all parts of the field. *Et uda mobilibus pomaria rivis.* This is the key, this is the problem. *Hoc opus, hic labor.* That is the question. English too comes in well in a speech, almost better than Latin. Quotations make a good effect. And phrases too. The prestige of institutions, the era of sacrifices, the slavery of the world, the triumph of ideas, the force of right as opposed to the right of force, the vast field of hypotheses and the severe school of facts. See how easily I find them. How they flourish on the tip of my tongue.

This *flourish* too. I did not search for it. Tiraquelli, my friend, we are born orators; we ought to be in the Senate."

Here the Sub-Prefect suddenly stopped.

"But when?" thought he. "First of all promotion to the Prefecture, and a little luck in order to rise a step. Yet before all things the Francavilla-Ruzzani marriage. And this devil of a Signor Prospero, who has not yet written. It is quite possible that he is not good at writing, and feels ashamed of himself. If I knew where he was staying, I would send him a telegram."

This chance idea of the telegram, struck the Sub-Prefect again next day. Signor Prospero had given no sign of life, and Cavaliere Tiraquelli was on thorns.

"Ah, I will be even with him. He did not tell me what hotel he was going to; but he shall see that I know all the same. Nothing escapes the vigilant eye of authority."

And that same day, the Sub-Prefect of

Castelnuovo telegraphed to the Quaestor of Milan, to ask at which hotel a certain Signor Prospero Gentili was lodging, of whom he gave all the necessary particulars.

"He will be surprised to-morrow, to receive my telegram before getting up. Dear Signor Prospero. However, he will be obliged to answer me."

Meanwhile the reply from the Quaestor of Milan arrived. According to the respective lists of travellers, there was no Prospero Gentili in any hotel, nor anyone like him, with or without a niece.

I wish you could have seen the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo's face after reading that telegram. The porter who brought the paper, and saw him receive it with such joyous eagerness, took to his heels as fast as he could, so as not to receive the inkstand or some other piece of the study furniture at his head. The secretary came for his signature, and was sent to the devil. The Sub-

Prefectess entered, and was sent with the secretary. In short our friend was boiling over with rage, and ended by shutting himself up in his office, declaring that he would see no one the whole day.

Signor Prospero was not gone to Milan. What was the meaning of this strange affair? Worse still, what was the meaning of this lie? Because it really was a lie, and told deliberately. It was the "lying consciously" which is so general in politics. Signor Prospero's lie would have been pardonable, had he been alone. Good heavens, who has not gallant adventures? And is it necessary that a man should say openly where he is going to? But Signor Gentili had gone with his niece, and after having personally taken leave.

It was a serious matter; it approached very near contempt. Contempt of authority. The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia was not a man to tolerate it.

And meanwhile no one came near him. He was left alone in his suspense, without any opportunity of giving vent to his feelings. The Cavaliere then remembered having said he would not see anybody.

And seizing the bell, he rang furiously.

The porter appeared on the threshold.

"What are your orders, Signor Cavaliere?"

"Tell Signor Borgnetti to come here."

Signor Borgnetti was the delegate of public safety in the province of Castelnuovo Bedonia.

An idea suggested itself to the Sub-Prefect when the porter had gone. Supposing the Quaestor of Milan had made a mistake in denying Signor Gentili's arrival in that city? But no, how could he be mistaken, if he had seen the list of travellers? Or perhaps on his way to Milan, Signor Prospero had thought it advisable to change his name? And wherefore? But even had he done this, Cavaliere Tiraquelli's telegram to the Quaestor

of Milan, clearly explained the person's characteristics, and the Quaestor's telegram answered both matters with equal clearness.

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo was quite at sea.

"Oh, I must find out," he muttered. "I will find out, should it cost me— It is a dirty trick that Signor Prospero is playing me. But, is it possible? No, it cannot be, there must be some mystery. Ah, petulant fool! Idiot from head to foot! So you are to be made Commendatore! Never fear, I will give you the collar! But what can have happened, to make this Signor Prospero— I should be sorry if any misfortune had befallen him on the road. But in this case why not send me word?"

The Sub-Prefect again laid hold of the bell, and rang for the second time. The porter reappeared in the doorway.

"Signor Borgnetti?"

"They have gone to call him. He was in bed and is dressing."

"In bed at this hour? And the Government does not complain that its bread is eaten in idleness?"

At length Borgnetti appeared. He was a strange, miserable, hungry-looking creature, in colour and substance, like a stockfish, with flowing whiskers, an imperial, bent outwards, restless grey eyes, a mania to appear like a Spanish *hidalgo*, with the sole result of being compared to Don Quixote, of Maucia. His great undertakings were restricted to sundry articles for the newspapers, dashed off at the eleventh hour. To say the truth, he was victim of his excessive candour. The Government detested him, because some time before, one of his writings was very nearly being the cause of raising a European question. He was a good sort of fellow, as you will have understood, incapable of those ugly

things of which he boasted with so much high-mindedness, and I may add, incapable of hurting a fly, though he never could keep his hands still.

"You were asleep," observed the Sub-Prefect severely.

"Cavaliere," murmured the delegate, "when the office is closed, when there is nothing to be done"—

"There is always something to be done in your office, as in mine," replied his superior. "Sit down. We have to speak at some length. I am dissatisfied with you."

"With me?"

"With you."

"But, the reason?"

"The reasons you mean? The reasons are several. I speak frankly, because you like candour."

"It is my defect," replied the hidalgo with emphasis.

"Good; I hear then there is a report that

the police in Castelnuovo Bedonia is badly organised; yes, very badly. I receive continual complaints from Government, always and only about this. Those three robbers, why are they not captured? Why are they allowed to infest the country, to the great peril of"—

"Robbers!" interrupted the Delegate. "Say rather rebels against the conscription. It is a crime, I know; but this is not a question of men who are dangerous. Hitherto they have stolen nothing; the peasants protect and shelter them from all research on the part of authority. Active service among the passes of Monte Acuto, in those forests of beeches and ash trees is by no means the easiest thing in the world. In a little while even the three rebels will be taken; a little time is necessary, nothing else."

"The Mayor of Trigallo," continued the Sub-Prefect, by no means mollified, "per-

severes in turning a deaf ear to our injunctions."

"That is not my business," replied the Delegate; "it is yours."

"Whatever relates to the quarrels which happen, or may happen in the country, pertains to the public safety, and you ought to think of it," disputed the Sub-Prefect.

"But then, according to you, nothing concerns the public safety. One thing regards the Carabineers, another the porters, something else the Custom House officers; the Quaestor's guards should stay in the guard house, and the Delegate divide his time between bed and literature. I speak candidly, because you like candour. From you, from your office, one cannot even find out whence came and whither go so many persons, who come and go."

"Explain yourself," said Signor Borgnetti; who this time had forgotten to boast of his defect, which was brought to his re-

collection with evident irony by his irascible superior. "Explain yourself?"

"Immediately," replied the Sub-Prefect, who had reached the point he was aiming at. "You do not even keep a daily list of those who arrive in the province, and those who depart from it."

"You never asked me for one."

"Are these things to be asked for? They are the elements, the first rudiments of the trade."

"Trade?" observed Signor Borguetti, who was put out.

"Well, then, say priesthood, and leave me alone. I repeat certain things ought to be known. Because then, it happens—"

"What happens? From all acounts, for a whole week no stranger has arrived who has given cause for the slightest suspicion. And as for departures, no one has stirred from here."

"No one! No one indeed! And Gentili,

who has gone away with his niece, is he then nobody?"

Borgnetti looked as if he had fallen from the clouds.

"Excuse me, Cavaliere," he said, "I did not number Gentili among those who are under supervision."

"All, all are equally so, and Signor Gentili ought not to be exempt from the common law," replied the Sub-Prefect. "What is departure? A fact. Well then you should take note of the fact, and the reasons of the fact in order that your superior may be informed of them."

"I hope at least," the poor Delegate tried to say, "that you know the reasons of Gentili's journey without need of any investigations."

"I know what I know," answered the Sub-Prefect, "but you ought to commit them to paper, like all other information of the same nature. I ought to have them under my

eye as a professor of music has the score of the opera where all the different parts are indicated. The administration resembles an orchestra. Alas, if there is discord between two instruments, everything goes wrong. Where were we? Oh, yes, about this business of Signor Gentili. Can you tell me where Signor Gentili and his niece are gone to? It is an example which occurs to me for the demonstration of my assertion, and I make use of it. You will see later with what result. Well then, tell me where Gentili is?"

"At Milan," replied the Delegate.

"No," retorted the Sub-Prefect in a tone of reproach, as though it were entirely the Delegate's fault.

Borgnetti shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he answered, "everybody said so, and I never thought of doubting it. But if he has not gone to Milan, it means that he has gone elsewhere."

"And this is where you are at sea, my esteemed Signor Borgnetti. But to return to ourselves. Remember that I know everything, but that I wish to put you to the test. In fact, I am subjecting you to a species of trial of competency, and this is the theme—to discover where Signor Prospero has really gone to with his niece, Adele Ruzzani. If you are not successful in this trial, I warn you, Signor Borgnetti, that you will have to return to the Abruzzi whence you came to Castelnuovo Bedonia."

"Signor Cavaliere," cried Borgnetti, tossing his head with an attempt at haughtiness, "this is a proof of mistrust which I never could have believed"—

"Well, believe it now, and you will have no reason to be surprised again. I do my duty," muttered Cavaliere Tiraquelli, striding up and down the room with bowed head. "The Minister is crushing with his observations. Do you think it is a pleasant thing

to receive reproaches when one has every reason to expect commendation ?"

"No, indeed," replied Borgnetti, "and I for example "—

"And I for example," resumed the Sub-Prefect, who would naturally receive these reproofs indirectly through the Prefecture on which Castelnuovo is dependent, "am blamed directly by his Excellency the Home Secretary for the sole reason that I enjoy his particular favour. Here," added the Sub-Prefect, taking a letter from his writing desk and displaying it as high as his head, "yesterday the Minister wrote to me—

"'DEAR TIRAQUELLI,

"'Just see whether you have a competent delegate or no. From what I hear I should think not. Would you like another? You have only to ask for one.'"

The Delegate thought it rather strange that the Home Secretary should meddle with

these trivialities concerning so unimportant a province as Castelnuovo Bedonia; but not being able to doubt the fact so boldly asserted by his superior, and corroborated by a letter of that kind, he risked a severe criticism on the dignity of Ministers in general and the Home Secretary in particular.

"It only shows about what things a Minister troubles himself!" he said aside. "At least, if there was the shadow of a reason for it!"

The Sub-Prefect put down the letter on the writing-desk, not without glancing haughtily at Borgnetti to see what effect this specimen of epistolary style had made upon him. The poor Delegate stood his ground, but became as green as a lizard.

"Do you understand?" cried the Sub-Prefect emphatically. "The tone is friendly, but nevertheless the blow has fallen; and in the meantime you cannot even tell me where Gentili is gone. The easiest thing in the

world! It is not a question of going in pursuit of a thief who escapes at night, nor of a bankrupt who is obliged to conceal himself from the combined researches of authority and his own creditors. It is a question of a peaceful and honest citizen who, having nothing to conceal, goes away quietly in broad daylight for a pleasure trip. And you know nothing!"

"If you had expressed the slightest desire of knowing anything I would have had his movements followed; I would have followed him myself for greater security," answered the Delegate. "Observe, Cavaliere, that I happened to be in the Piazza dello Statuto when Signor Gentili entered his carriage.

"'Signor Gentili, are you going away?'

"'Yes, I am going to Milan.'

"'Ah, well, it is a city worth visiting. Shall you be away long?'

"'Oh, about a fortnight.'"

"A fortnight!" exclaimed the Sub-

Prefect. "And he had said to me a week!"

"Yes," replied the Delegate, "he said a fortnight."

"'I hope you will enjoy yourself,' I answered.

"'And I wish you, Signor Borgnetti, perfect tranquillity in Castelnuovo.'

"Thus we parted. Was I to imagine that he was laughing at me?"

"Were you?" retorted the Sub-Prefect with nervous eloquence worthy of Alfieri.

"But, pardon me, it was not a question of a thief—of a bankrupt—"

"One never knows. Man is always a dangerous creature for the officer of public safety. To-day he is well; to-morrow he is ill. To-day his affairs prosper, and he is an honest man; to-morrow they go wrong, and he is guilty of forgery. Nothing and nobody should escape the vigilant eye of authority.

Maledictus homo qui fidit in homine ought to be the maxim of the Quaestorship, and also of other higher offices," murmured the Sub-Prefect, heaving a sigh.

"Signor Cavaliere, I promise that you shall know where Gentili has gone."

"Yes, bravo, how can you now?"

"I will do my best, though somewhat late. Since you will not tell me—"

"Oh! I like that. I give you the test, and am to furnish you with the answer. Go there, prosecute your investigations, tell me the easiest thing in the world, and I will reinstate you in my favour."

The Delegate went away with his reprimand. When he was on the stairs he burst out laughing.

"I am a fool to frighten myself with these presumptuous artifices," he said. "This pompous lawyer is in a rage with Gentili, who has deceived him. He knows nothing,

and wants my help without appearing to do so. Well, we will humour him! Superiors are always like that. It all depends on one's capacity of finding out the temper of the animal."

CHAPTER VII.

The second Wednesday reception at the Sub-Prefecture had taken place, and still Adele Ruzzani was absent. The major planet was invisible, and although all the minor planets displayed themselves, yet the heavens seemed to be deprived of light. By the bye, this must not be repeated to the young Countess Gamberini, or to Countess Beatrice, her mother. In their opinion, where they are there is the whole world, or to put it more modestly nothing can be wanting. The Sub-Prefect was still in the dark concerning the fate of Signor Gentili and his beautiful niece. Neither could that pattern Delegate discover anything, although, to set to work the right way and thoroughly sift the matter, he had sent the detectives in plain clothes to make inquiries at the Ruzzani's house.

"The proprietors are gone to Milan," answered the secretary.

"To Milan," added the steward.

"To Milan," affirmed the cook.

"To Milan," repeated the scullion.

Had there been a parrot in the Ruzzani's house, I am sure Signor Borgnetti would have had one more testimony to the departure for Milan.

To seek information at the house of the absentees was certainly not the best way of getting it authentic. But the Delegate was at a loss to know what saint to address, especially as the patron saint of quaestors and delegates has not yet been selected, and perhaps it is rather late in the day to think of doing so. In the town all trace of the offenders was missing. Their carriage had conveyed them to the station, and from thence express trains departed twice a day, so that, by the clock, it was impossible to decide whether they had gone east or west. You

say the Carabineers will know; but at that period there was some disagreement between the Carabineers and the police—disagreement which I believe has not yet been healed. Questioned about Signor Gentili's departure, the Carabineers replied—

"We are at the station to watch suspicious characters. Signor Gentili is not a suspicious character; therefore"—

It was impossible to dispute the syllogism, and it was not the Carabineers' business to know which way Signor Prospero was gone. But was he indeed gone? The Carabineers shrugged their shoulders. Neither did this concern them. The Carabineer is subject to military authority alone. Now when this authority does not bid him remember a fact, the Carabineer is quite at liberty to forget it, or better still, take no notice of it. Thus matters remained wholly unintelligible.

Meanwhile the Sub-Prefect could not give vent to his rage with anyone; he was obliged

to keep silence and fume inwardly, above all things be silent, even with the Duke of Francavilla, who every now and then gently sounded him about his own happiness.

"Well, Cavaliere, when do our travellers return?"

"In a few days, Duke, in a few days. Are you impatient?"

"Good God, the days seem like months. I do not deny that Castelnuovo is a fine city—"

"To whom do you say that?" cried the Sub-Prefect, foreseeing the rest. "I am longing to go away, to quit this country of obstinate bears. But the time must come, thank heaven, it must come some day or other. But I beg your Grace to satisfy my curiosity. Do you like Signorina Ruzzani very much? I thought the young Countess Berta Gamberini also—"

"There are thousands of Berta Gamberinis in every town in Italy," asserted the Duke of Francavilla.

"Ah, I understand; I understand that you would not have put yourself out to come all the way to Castelnuovo Bedonia," replied the Sub-Prefect, shaking his head. "And then there isthe Minister's great and brilliant idea which would overwhelm every other reason should there be any. Marvellous conceptions, if they are possible! But it is only too true that the highest conceptions have not always the good fortune to be realised. And the Government is satisfied with a very low ideal."

"What do you mean?" cried the Duke of Francavilla. "Do you see any obstacles in the way of this negotiation?"

"No," replied the Sub-Prefect. "At least we might say yes and no, no and yes. As you are aware these matters must be managed with the greatest delicacy. Now when one examines a thing so slightly it is difficult to know whether one has made much progress

or not. Do you understand me? But the fact is, Signor Prospero, the girl's guardian, is delighted, and feels highly honoured by this scheme. As regards the young lady, what can I say more than that she has taken it into her head to have all the family jewels reset."

"What an odd fancy!" exclaimed the Duke. "Could not that have been done afterwards?"

"Well, Duke, all girls have a touch of vanity. This one, we know, has always had her own way, and acted on first impulses. At all events let us sympathise with her. She is to marry a Duke of Francavilla, and does not want the world to think meanly of her. Everything in her house is to be done up. After the jewels, you will see, it will be the furniture and everything else. I wager that they will restore the façade of the palace."

The Duke compressed his lips as if he

were not at all pleased with certain details. He shook his head and walked away.

"Ouf!" said the Sub-Prefect when he was alone, "it is a great bore to be obliged to dissimulate! And then to keep it up!"

Fancy in what a frame of mind he went through his duties as host on that second Wednesday already mentioned, and with what pleasure he heard such remarks as these—

"That Signor Prospero is a traitor! Who would ever have believed it with that innocent countenance of his! To abandon us without one word of warning! At least, if he only had left us; but the idea of carrying off Signorina Adele as well! This is really too bad. We will demand satisfaction! We will make him repent it!"

Whilst this trifling conversation was going on in the young people's circle, seated near the round table, the Duke of Francavilla was absently turning over the pages of an album for the tenth or twelfth time and

sending Castelnuovo Bedonia and all its dependents to the devil.

The young Countess Berta sat at the piano and played a romance for Signora Morselli who vanished without reason. The evening was cold, almost colder than that of the preceding week; all present, some more, some less, some for one reason, some for another, had a fit of the blues.

Countess Beatrice Gamberini alone was livelier, more ostentatious, plumper, rosier than ever.

Have you ever tried placing a withered apple under the bellglass of a pneumatic machine? Gradually as the air becomes rarefied, the apple loses its creases; the skin is raised up, it becomes stretched, it shines and gives you the idea of being fresh. Even so Countess Beatrice; seen at a certain distance thus painted, and with eyes full of unwonted vivacity, she appeared ten years younger.

Countess Beatrice was the only person who that evening had not worried the Sub-Prefect with the never ending subject of Signor Prospero and Signorina Adele. She was the kindest of Countesses! Nothing short of divine! Cavaliere Tiraquelli in his secret soul vowed immense gratitude to her. And, in order to show it in some way and also to free himself from the importunate enquiries of the rest, he took a seat by the side of the Countess, chatting to her, and agreeing with everything she said.

They had talked of various things, of a homily of the bishop's, of a letter about Castelnuovo printed previously in one of the local papers, of commercial administration, and of fashions. The variety of the topics had attracted the greater part of the guests round the red velvet sofa, and even the girls who generally gathered round the pianoforte. From fashions they naturally came to speak of the luxury, really lavish, which had taken

possession of all social classes, even in the little town of Castelnuovo Bedonia; then of limited means, of bad harvests, with a little digression on agriculture.

"Signor Prospero Gentili ought to be here," said the Recorder suddenly. "We should have a fine discourse on artificial manure."

This personal allusion jarred on Cavaliere Tiraquelli's nerves. Was it a presentiment?

"Signor Gentili! Poor man!" exclaimed Countess Beatrice, turning up her eyes.

"Poor man! Why?" enquired the Recorder.

The Sub-Prefect asked nothing, but he also stared and opened his mouth. He followed every word Countess Gamberini said, as the snake follows the charmer.

"Do you not know?" replied the Countess. "He has become a monk."

This unexpected revelation was received with a general exclamation of surprise.

"Monk!" cried the Recorder. "And where?"

"Not far from us; in the convent of fools."

The shell had burst. And that great, fat, ingenuous Countess Beatrice sat there, her arms crossed, mouth open, and eyes fixed amongst that score of amazed people as if she was not the cause of the explosion.

The Duke of Francavilla had raised his head and ceased turning over the leaves of his album. The young Countess Berta on her side had softly and unobserved drawn near the circle round the red velvet sofa.

"Of fools!" stammered the Sub-Prefect.

"Yes, good heavens; did you not know it?" retorted Countess Beatrice.

"Well," replied the Sub-Prefect, seeing that everyone looked towards him and that there was no means of evasion, "we must make a distinction; for example, I know and I don't

know. But pray, Countess, tell us what you know of this determination of Signor Prospero's? Should there be any discrepancy between your information and mine," added Cavaliere Tiraquelli with an air of supreme condescension, "we can mutually correct each other as we find it necessary."

"Oh! I warn you that you won't correct me," cried Countess Gamberini. "I know little, but that little I have on good authority."

"*Da fonte per ordinario assai bene informata,*" observed the Recorder laughing.

But no journalist was present to blush, and this egregious nonsense scarcely aroused a smile in the two or three who understood it.

"From my agent," resumed the Countess. "And this is how it happened. My agent had gone into the country to Serra to see a small estate we have between Monte Acuto and San Bruno. He was just coming down

a path in the midst of the beech trees when he saw two people on donkeys, followed by a peasant carrying two travelling bags. One of these persons was Signor Prospero Gentili."

"When?" enquired the Sub-Prefect, as though he wished to confirm the facts and dates.

"Nine days ago," answer the Countess. "Signor Gentili did not perceive our agent, who was hidden behind the bushes; but the latter saw him and recognised him perfectly. And when he met the peasant returning to the plain with the two humble beasts, he asked him how it was that he had left Signor Gentili up there."

"And what did he say?"

"The peasant answered that he did not know Signor Gentili. He had found him with his companion near the railway station. He had offered to carry the travelling bags, and was answered: 'We want to go to San Bruno, can you procure us two

animals to ride?' 'Certainly,' replied the peasant, 'I have just what you want at my father's house.' Thus they had made acquaintance and come to an agreement. The peasant accompanied them as far as the bridge of San Bruno and heard these words from the travellers themselves—'We wish to become monks,' said to the lay brother who opened the gate."

All these details made a great impression on the minds of the listeners. So great had been the surprise that no one had thought of asking who was Signor Gentili's companion in that application for admission. But the young Countess Berta was ready with the question. She came forward with her youthful ingenuousness and asked—

"Was Adele there also?"

"Adele also!" replied the Countess to her daughter.

"She will find it rather difficult to become a monk," said the Recorder.

"It is a joke! a girl's caprice!" murmured the Sub-Prefect.

"Joke or caprice as much as you like," observed Signora Morselli. "But a woman —a girl—in a convent of men—"

"Good heavens!" interrupted that divine creature, Countess Beatrice. "Adele is with her guardian, her mother's brother. I don't see any harm in it. Ah, my lord Duke," continued Countess Beatrice, turning to Francavilla, who had remained there stupified, and was beginning to look like Don Bartolo, instead of Almaviva as he wished, "you gave too glowing a description of the convent of San Bruno, and our friends have fallen desperately in love with it."

The Duke of Francavilla laughed foolishly, then bit his lips, and again began turning over the leaves of his album. There was great confusion, a regular Babel in the reception room of the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia. And in truth there was

matter for discussion on every side. A more fruitful pretext had never occurred. Just imagine Signorina Adele in a convent of men! Could it possibly be true? And if untrue, how far was it so? Certainly the idea of that excursion had occurred to her and her guardian had simply obeyed. All came to the conclusion that it was rather different to going to Milan! Rather different to having all the family jewels reset the Sub-Prefect might have come to the conclusion.

The worthy representative of government in Castelnuovo Bedonia did not endeavour any longer to conceal his ignorance. This news, so unexpected, so incomprehensible had knocked him down, had dumbfounded him. It is needless to say that all that evening no mention was made of the usual dancing. A fine quadrille indeed the Duke of Francavilla would have led! Berta, the charming young Countess, passed by that

wreck of a Duke and glanced at him compassionately, then returning to the piano, she remained there all alone, running her agile fingers up and down the keys, drawing forth subdued harmonies, whilst there, near the velvet sofa, a diabolical noise was being made. I have told you already that the shell had burst, it was necessary to gather up the fragments.

That evening one by one all the guests escaped two hours earlier than usual. There was no dancing, and the early departures were thus excused.

The Duke of Francavilla was the last to remain. Sooner than be obliged to undergo five minutes' conversation with him, the Sub-Prefect would under these circumstances rather have been ten feet underground. But the Duke of Francavilla either did not notice his miserable condition, or had no mercy on him; and going up to him without holding out his hand, as the Sub-Prefect hoped, he

interrogated him with a bend of the head. The Sub-Prefect answered with a similar inclination—

"What is the meaning of this story?"

"I know as much as you do."

"But—and your conversations with Signor Prospero?"

"They were not with the young lady as I had already told you!"

"And the story of the jewels?"

"Good heavens! An artifice to gain time."

The Duke was getting angry.

"Could they have anything to find fault with as regards myself?" he asked, his wrath increasing.

"I do not think so. How could they? I ask you. But they may want a little time to think about it. Those who possess money always have some suspicion, some hesitation. In short, I don't know what. My Lord Duke expound Dante who is worth the

trouble, and who makes even asses cut a pretty good figure. In commenting on Signor Prospero's obscure ways there is much less enjoyment, and even a Sub-Prefect would thereby become an ass."

Having said this the good man sank down on the red velvet sofa like one who is resolved not to comment on anything more.

The Duke walked to and fro and did not give the least sign of intending to go. All at once he stopped, looked his host full in the face and said—

"What will the Minister say to it?"

The menacing shade evoked by the Duke of Francavilla rose up before the poor Cavaliere's eyes; and where was his nomination to the Prefecture, the Commenda, and the dignity of Senator?

That triple form of his future greatness was rapidly fading from his sight. *Illa levem fugiens raptim secat aethera pennis*, Virgil would have said.

"What should I know about it?" cried the Sub-Prefect with the anguish of a drowning man. "Will your Grace condemn me for a fault which is not mine? Signor Prospero is an idiot, and will never be Commendatore. Though, to be just, one condition does not absolutely exclude the other. But it may be that—we will not judge without knowing how matters stand. We must have a little time to set us right again! In the meantime, with your permission, I will send for the Delegate of public safety. I have to give some orders."

The Duke of Francavilla went away, indifferently satisfied with that delay, and the Sub-Prefect called the porter, who at certain hours of the day exercised also the office of servant.

"Where is the Delegate? In bed?"

"Oh, not now, Signor Cavaliere. At this hour he will be at the *café* of the Three Roses playing at cards with the Mayor."

"Go and call him, I must see him immediately."

Cavaliere Tiraquelli having been so much worried all the evening wanted to vent his feelings on someone. And the intended victim was poor Signor Borgnetti.

The Delegate arrived at the Sub-Prefecture with a cheerful countenance, rather too cheerful, which indicated a full stomach and an easy conscience.

"Well, have you heard anything?" asked the Sub-Prefect.

"Yes," replied the Delegate, winking and smiling with unwonted familiarity.

"Out with it then!"

"In the Convent of San Bruno," replied Signor Borgnetti. "He is gone to the convent by way of a joke, and his niece is with him. To become monks—also for fun. Only imagine what fools! The girl will never find a husband now; the uncle is an imbecile."

"As to Signor Prospero, I agree with you," observed the Sub-Prefect, very wisely. "But as to the young lady, know Signor Borgnetti that with a dowry like hers— "

"I understand, people are blind to many things."

"Besides," answered the Sub-Prefect, "there is no harm. It is only a question of an ignorant girl's caprice, and the uncle's presence will impose silence on malicious people. But now tell me the rest. Because I imagine that as soon as you found the clue you followed it up to the end."

"Oh, not much farther than this. My friend did not know anything more, and only told me a few minutes ago. We were talking together about it when the porter came and called me."

"A few minutes ago!" exclaimed the Sub-Prefect. "Your friend! But who is he?"

"Well, I don't wish to make a mystery of it. I heard everything—from the Recorder."

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia gave one bound from his seat, and the shock caused the Delegate to rebound also.

"From the Recorder!" exclaimed the Government's worthy representative. "From the Recorder who had heard it from me!"

"Excuse me, not from you," retorted the Delegate, in whom the fumes of wine had awakened a sentiment of rebellion; "from Countess Gamberini. You see, Cavaliere, women alone are able to find out things. As a rule, the most important discoveries are made by accident. The mysterious trace guessed by a few fugitive signs, is only heard of in novels. But the Quaestor of Rossano, whose subordinate I was before coming to Castelnuovo, was saying precisely the same thing. 'If you want to get on in life,' observed that incomparable man, 'let people think that everything is owing to your skill; but in secret do not be ashamed of not being clever. No one is in these matters. Fortune

is a woman, and it is right that she should fall in love with someone, that is all.' "

The Sub-Prefect could have throttled him with his own hands, that bantering Delegate.

"You have been drinking rather freely to-day," he said, sarcastically.

"Oh, a little, very little," replied the Delegate, with an air of extreme candour. "Not more than one bottle of *Capri bianco.* The keeper of mortgages has had some sent him from Naples, where he lived five years. He invited me to celebrate its arrival, and we have been two hours in *gaudeamus.*"

"Happy are you who have time to waste!" exclaimed the Sub-Prefect, with a severe countenance, which formed a contrast to that figure which augured benevolence. "Go and sleep now, whilst I watch for you and everyone."

And with a stately gesture, as accompaniment to that stately dismissal, the Sub-

Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia turned his back on the Delegate Borgnetti.

"He knew nothing," said Signor Borgnetti, as he descended the stairs, rubbing his hands. "He knew nothing about Signor Prospero, that is why he flew into a rage, seeing that Countess Gamberini's police is better organised than his. But beware Signor Borgnetti," added he, gravely, "it is we who are responsible for the police of the Sub-Prefecture of Castelnuovo, and we must not speak evil of it. Pshaw! After all must one have one's eye on every trumpery trifle in Castelnuovo Bedonia. Was not my old principal right in saying Fortune is a woman? May fortune come and take the place of talent."

CHAPTER VIII.

We left our novices at the Convent of San Bruno ; let us rejoin them in their cells. But not to bring them away, be it understood. This would satisfy the Sub-Prefect, but would cut short the thread of our narrative.

Brother Adelindo was a little disconcerted at finding that his cell was separated from that of Brother Prospero, his excellent uncle and companion in seclusion. Without realising his new condition, the charming little friar had reckoned on their sharing their quarters, and was not at all prepared for the idea of being alone in two solitary little rooms like a Camaldolesian of former days. Well, one must have patience. Brother Adelindo desired to act like a man, and thanks to his monk's hood, he obtained courage. Besides, the door was of oak, the

bars solid, and a person fastened inside might sleep tranquilly, especially in a peaceful habitation where all were brothers.

Father Prospero bit his lips and shook his head. He did not much like this adventure. Neither was he at all pleased with Brother Giocondo's inquisitive glances, divided equally between himself and Brother Adelindo, who, as yet, so little resembled a monk, and was so unlike a man in addition.

Certainly, with all the uncle's good-will, he could not contribute to his manly appearance. Brother Giocondo's visit to the tailor sufficed to make him look more like a monk. Tunics were prepared for the five who were expected that week, two of them might be withdrawn from their destination and serve for the new-comers. And, while walking to the tailor's, Brother Giocondo, muttered to himself—

"What a stripling! He is too young! He looks like a child."

In the corridor our lay brother met Father Bonaventura.

"Well, Brother Giocondo," said the astronomer of San Bruno, "what news? Have the five arrived?"

"No father; there have come instead the two who do not belong to the five."

"Two new ones then?"

"Bran new. One indeed seems to me too new, and I can't think how the prior could admit him."

"Brother Giocondo, we must not question the prior's authority."

"Oh, I do not question it. I say that I do not understand. But then it is not my business to understand. I act porter, cellarist, steward, and, when necessary, master of the ceremonies."

"These numerous occupations will help to keep you in training," said Father Bonaventura, laughing. "You get too fat, Brother Giocondo!"

"From worry, father—from worry!"

And Brother Giocondo went off to the tailor's to fetch the two tunics.

The noise of the two new guests' arrival was immediately spread throughout the convent. In the refectory that day there was great excitement. The monks of the new order of San Bruno lived indeed out of the world, but they could not fail to retain some small remnant of their past lives, just as in the bottom of a glass there is a tinge of red colour, sign of the wine which has been drunk a short time before. And then we do not say that these good hermits had renounced all the habits of life. They had formed this little world for themselves, but the little world does not exclude curiosity, especially when it concerns persons who come to live amongst us.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the convent bell rang the summons to the refectory. The monks immediately rushed simultane-

ously from their cells, and with such haste it made one think they waited for that moment with their hands on the latch of the door. All were present; Father Anacleto, Prior, and Fathers Anselmo, Bonaventura, Atanasio, Marcellino, Tranquillo, Natale, Restituto, Ottaviano. And all, as they went along under the arches of the portico, cast furtive glances at the doors of the two cells, from which the new guests of the convent of San Bruno were to make their exit.

One of these doors opened, and there appeared suddenly a strange, round creature, a jovial spirit in a monk's habit. It was Signor Prospero. A few seconds later the other door opened and a handsome little father issued, on whom the inquisitive glances of the whole family of monks were turned. Good heavens what an angel in monk's disguise!

Angels, archangels, seraphim, cherubim, thrones, denominations, virtues, powers, prin-

cipalities, say to which of your choirs and to which of your hierarchies that charming little fair-haired father belonged, with those cherry-coloured lips, those rosy cheeks, and those roguish little eyes. In truth, I tell you, had it not been for those eyes the little father would have been taken for a little nun. They would perhaps have been suspicious of the cheeks which were covered with the *color di fiamma viva*; but the little father had resolutely compelled himself to summon up his courage, he had raised his eyes full of malice, parted his lips in a cunning smile, every suspicion vanished.

"So young, and yet shut oneself up here!" exclaimed the fathers who were assembled for observation in front of the refectory door.

The prior heard these words, which might also be a half reproof for his excessive laxity, and, to put a stop to all grumbling, he thus spoke, referring to the new-comers—

"Brothers, I introduce to you two guests, two companions, Father Prospero and Father Adelindo. The latter is perhaps rather young, and I did not fail to mention this to him. But he refuses on any condition to be separated from his uncle, and nobly participates in the melancholy causes which have severed Father Prospero from the vanities and afflictions of the world."

You should have seen Signor Prospero Gentili's face of delight at that moment, but let us proceed without describing that which each one of you can picture to himself.

"I have not altogether yielded to his urgent entreaties," continued Father Anacleto. "Feeling doubtful about his vocation, which cannot as yet be ascertained as was that of each one of us, I have admitted him as a novice only, and as a novice consequently I have received his uncle, for I did not wish to separate two blood relations by promises too disproportionate. I have done

something new, not in conformity with our usual custom, interpreting the precept that when the law is silent, liberty of action is understood."

"*In dubiis libertas*," observed Father Bonaventura.

"Thanks, *et in omnibus charitas*," replied Father Anacleto. "I hope, therefore, my dear brethren will not disapprove of this innovation, keeping in mind the motives which have dictated it."

The little father looked at his judges, and to his satisfaction perceived that not one of them would have objected.

"Good advice," murmured Father Atanasio.

"Like everything our worthy prior says," added Father Restituto.

"So be it then with the will of God," resumed Father Anacleto, not expecting any further signs of approbation. "And now, my brothers, let us see how the cook treats

us. I warn you," he added, turning to the two novices, "that here the food is not good."

"And the wine worse," muttered Brother Giocondo, who closed the procession.

Father Prospero thought it necessary to reply that he and his nephew would willingly put up with anything to be admitted into the community of San Bruno. Poor Signor Prospero! He always felt the fair-haired little father's eyes upon him, whom there was no means of resisting when he had set his mind on anything. At any rate, there was no longer any question of going to the Arctic Pole or to the sources of the Nile, and then, thank Heaven, this folly of the cloister would not last for ever! Father Anacleto was really a good fellow to accept them only as novices. Good Father Anacleto! The least one could do was to reply to him in the same tone.

"Don't mention it! On the contrary, the

more frugal the meal the better for my health," replied Signor Prospero. "I was getting too stout, though from no fault of mine."

"Exercise, brother, exercise," recommended one of the monks who was next Signor Prospero. "One must fight against polysarchy in time."

"Poly—" stammered Signor Prospero, bowing to his new interlocutor.

"Sarchy," repeated the other, who was the doctor of the community. "It is composed of two Greek words, *poly* and *sarcos*, and signifies abundance of flesh. To say the truth, this would not be a great evil, but the word is inappropriately used to signify an excess of fat which is better expressed by the word *polypyony*, also Greek, *pyon* being the exact equivalent to fat."

"Only fancy what monsters I have in my inside," murmured Signor Prospero. "Polysarchy! Polypyony! Many thanks, father. May I ask your name?"

"Tranquillo, at your service. It is the name I chose on entering here. And indeed I am tranquil, for *inveni portum*, and I may add with the poet: *Spes et fortuna valete; sat me lusistis, ludite nunc alios.*"

Signor Prospero preferred remaining ignorant to inquiring the translation of the distich.

"I have fallen on my feet," he said to himself. "They are all learned here; they have Greek and Latin at their fingers' ends. One is astronomer, another chemist, a third archæologist, a fourth mechanician. But, bless my soul, am I not agriculturist? The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo made me that. And my nephew makes me a monk. Will they both stop here?"

"Whilst making these observations, Signor Prospero (rather let us at once call him Father Prospero, to make him equal with his colleagues) found himself seated at table between Father Tranquillo, doctor, and Father

Marcellino, philosopher. His nephew, either by chance or by choice, was on the other side of the table next the prior who had joined him on entering the refectory.

The hall was large, and appeared twice as much so on account of being white and bare. The new monks of San Bruno had not put themselves to any expense there; they had not attempted to embellish that part of their habitation. However, they had left a certain pulpit standing, intended for the lecture during meals. Fortunately no one read anything from there now, the new rule of San Bruno not having deemed it necessary to make a bad dinner worse by detestable reading.

The ancient Camaldolesians used to take their food in that refectory once a week; every other day they dined in their cells, and the disciplinary broth was conveyed to them by those wheels already mentioned. Then they drank water out of certain terra cotta

bowls, which they raised to their lips, holding them with both hands—rather an inconvenient mode of drinking, but the custom. And to approach the ancient customs in some degree, the reformists of San Bruno had abolished glasses, keeping to certain bowls of majolica, which did not even possess the merit of issuing from the manufactory of Ginori.

Pray do not look on it as a caprice. Questioned about this apparent eccentricity, Father Anacleto might have given you a very plausible reason for it. Love of the table is enhanced by table linen, fine plate, sparkling crystal. A quantity of wine glasses, cut, bright, clear, opaque, some hard as the diamond, some delicate and fine as muslin, make one drink three times as much as is necessary. Try instead to drink Rhenish or Burgundy in a bowl of terra cotta, roughly varnished. That wine will seem to you very indifferent; you will swallow what is neces-

sary, not a drop more. Conversely, bad wine will appear passably mediocre, and of that also you will drink as you eat—that is to say, as much as you really want for the inevitable necessities of life.

We will admire the reformists of San Bruno, and leave those who make merry to protest as they like. The table is also amongst the pleasures and vanities of the world which leave behind trouble and vexation of spirit. The thinker is sober; the workman may not be always sober, but he will never be addicted to the vice of gluttony.

Brother Adelindo, seated on the prior's right, was the subject of general curiosity. They tried not to show it, but their eyes strayed now and then from the plate to that fair head, to that swan-like neck which appeared just above the snuff-coloured cowl.

"Your nephew is very young," whispered Father Tranquillo to Father Prospero. "He will never fall in with our secluded life."

"Why not?" answered Father Prospero, who felt the necessity of dissimulating. "Young people are just the ones who can make certain sacrifices. Old clothes do not easily lose their creases."

"That is true in many cases," replied Father Tranquillo; "but as one is impelled to come here by a sincere and profound vocation, you must admit that the new crease is made before entering."

"Ah, yes, the vocation!" murmured Father Prospero. "It is a grand thing that vocation. Father, forgive my indiscretion. What has been your vocation?"

"Weariness," answered Father Tranquillo, "weariness of the world, weariness greater than I can say. I practised medicine for the good of my fellow-creatures. I might have done them harm, but they certainly did harm to me. I have abandoned them as you see, and am all the better for it. I wish them the same. Well, brother, there is no use in

concealing it! Not even the science of medicine can pretend to infallibility. It demands constant acts of faith; it is theology, or very much like it. One thing is certain —that nature possesses efficacious remedies, and living forces in the organism to make them act. We students of the art of healing can boast of nothing but a little intelligence in suiting certain remedies to man's needs. We are guilty of great audacity, in experiment; immense audacity, in declaring the malady; infinite audacity, in attributing to Nature the errors of our art, and to our art the benefits of Nature. This, Father Prospero, is medicine, from Hippocrates to Boheraave, and from Boheraave to me. I say to me in order not to wrong anybody," added Father Tranquillo laughing. "Empiricism, which is sometimes successful, doctrine, which occasionally hits the mark, nearly always dissent between theory and practice. This is our science. Wearied, I

tell you, Father Prospero, wearied of science, wearied of the world, wearied of everything else."

Evidently Father Tranquillo did not say all. In fact, if we consider it well, it is easy to perceive that he had said nothing. But this is the art of well-educated men who wish to conceal their thoughts, to appear to take you into their confidence and tell you everything frankly. Father Prospero was pleased with his neighbour's confidences, and vowed him eternal friendship.

"What a capital young fellow!" he said to himself. "With his talent he might become a second Galenus. And here he is instead, rejoicing, glad to have got his foot out of it as anyone else would be to have put his foot in it. Am I not indeed wrong to vex myself at having quitted the road to honour?"

Beautiful collar of the crown of Italy, beloved image, you were still dancing before Signor Prospero Gentili's eyes.

From time to time those eyes wandered with paternal solicitude to that fair novice seated by the side of the prior, sustaining his *rôle* of monk sufficiently well. The seraph did not blush any more, but he continued to speak little, and that little with a peculiar accent, as though he had difficulty in forming his words, or rather as though his teeth were closed.

No one except Father Prospero understood that that charming little father was trying to deepen his voice with the laudable intention of appearing quite different to what he really was. Did he succeed in this attempt? I do not know. Perhaps we who are in the secret feel doubtful, being unable to imagine that others do not guess it at once. However it may be, the graceful novice's attempt gave his speech a certain veiled accent of guttural sounds which was not at all unpleasing, on the contrary it seemed to add to his charms.

"What the devil does he hope for from

this perilous adventure?" exclaimed Father Prospero mentally. "I devoutly hope that in five or six days he will be tired of it, and that we shall return to Castelnuovo."

After dinner the community went to digest it on a terrace overlooking the country. The sun had already set, and the shadows of twilight began to ascend behind the precipice, in the depth of which roared the waters of the torrent. The outlines of the adjacent hills were growing dim; farther off the sloping peaks of the Appenines were tinged with purple and blue. Not a group of houses, not a trace of cultivated fields, was to be seen around; solitude reigned supreme, and in solitude thoughts are freely interchanged.

Every day after dinner the monks of San Bruno were in the habit of separating in little parties, and also in couples, to roam about for recreation, absorbed in familiar intercourse, which changed its bent according to the disposition of the companions and the humour

of the moment. That day instead they were all to assemble on the terrace and sit there chatting, like a company of merry-makers who put in practice the *post prandium stabis* of the ancient school of Salerno.

Father Adelindo, who had become rather confidential with his companions at table, noticed a sort of resemblance which was visible in all these countenances. Perhaps this was the result of living together, it being well known that every person, like everything in the world, assumes the colour of the circle in which he has remained a long time, and that certain modes of being, of expression, of reasoning, are easily and almost inadvertently copied one from the other. All the monks of San Bruno besides had together with this same appearance of youthfulness an authority, a fatherliness, I would almost say a self-possession, which indicated a riper age. And this might perhaps be attributed partly to the soberness of the costume they wore,

and partly to the storms through which they had passed before reaching that haven of refuge.

I think I have already mentioned why they were gathered together in that solitude. But why had they adopted that manner of dressing? Could they not live in community, and also conform to some friar-like order without the incumbrance of that tunic?

My readers, antiquity has a large share in the composition of novelty. We unwillingly renounce certain old customs when we wish the sensation to be renewed which used to accompany the representations of a time gone by. One might almost say that the inherent virtue in certain things lies wholly in the forms in which they are clothed. The Jews still use stone knives for their sacrifices, even after the long established use of iron. Tell the Freemasons to give up their symbolical rites, which remind us of the Templars on one side and the mediæval guilds on the

other, and they would tell you that precisely in those rites lies their strength, because in them is the poetry of their institution. What more do you want? One of my friends has sworn fidelity to his stirrups, which are attached to the bottom of his breeches to prevent these from rising up. He says and maintains that this is indispensable to his belief that he is always twenty years old. Well, if this suffices to keep up his illusion, could we wish to deprive him of his stirrups?

CHAPTER IX.

In the course of a month the convent of San Bruno had completely changed its appearance. First of all, and be it said without the shadow of an evil thought, a good deal of time was devoted to sleep; the remainder was divided between eating and working very diligently. You will already have guessed that the great undertaking of the community was the scientific journal. The five new colleagues who were expected had duly arrived; they also were in the vigour of age, and full of goodwill. The typographical cases had been fixed; also the printing press and a large drawing by Father Anacleto was on the point of incarnation, or, if you like better, of being covered with lead, because it was, in fact, a question of lead.

From nine which they had been a few

days before, the monks had thus reached the number of sixteen, and perhaps they were too many for that studious tranquillity at which Father Anacleto aimed.

"My brothers," the prior had said, gathering his increased family around him, "our order promises to prosper rapidly. Ought we to rejoice at this, or ought we to regret it? Certainly if we rejoice it will be for ourselves, not for the world, which has thus evidently lost all attraction for men. But we must also beware of one danger. It is a bad thing to be too many, and perhaps it will be necessary to think about founding a new convent, as San Bruno and San Bernardo di Chiaravalle did for their orders."

"We are not too many as yet," observed Father Marcellino modestly.

"We are quite contented thus," added Father Restituto.

"We are just like a family," affirmed Father Atanasio. "One feels a kind of charm

hitherto unknown, as the poet says, *intender non la può chi non la prova.*"

Father Atanasio expressed the general opinion far better than he in his own heart believed. There was in each one a sentiment of delicious satisfaction that I could not precisely explain to you without making the comparison of a kitchen. But mind, a poetical kitchen—one of those kitchens hidden between the gorges of our Appenines, a dark, smoky kitchen, so constructed that the flames in the wide fireplace do not waste their beneficial light on the walls, but concentrate it on the eight or ten persons happily seated round the hearth, their shoulders supported by the high backs of the oaken benches. Out of doors the snow is falling in large flakes, and the north wind is blowing sharply ; indoors we feel the delight of being under shelter, and in the company of those dearest to us. Here the family draws its sweet bonds closer; hospitality be-

comes friendship; that little frying pan of chestnuts which are crackling on the fire promises to be a savoury dish. From time to time, and as if to make the contrast more conspicuous, we look at the door, which shakes in the gusts of wind; then we turn again and gaze at the cheering flame. Good heavens! For one of those evenings in the Appenines I would give up I don't know what, even my office of historiographer of the reformed order of San Bruno. And how foolish do those appear who, possessing this good fortune, still complain and beg for something different from destiny. But we are all of us like this; we only understand when it is too late that the joys of life are restricted to few forms, few scenes, little pictures of every-day life as well as of history. I may almost say landscapes rather than pictures of every-day life, because figures are not always beautiful to look at, and a little corner with a ray of sunshine

across it may suffice for our peace of mind as well as for the consolation of our eyes.

You see, my readers, even when making a little digression I find I agree with the monks of San Bruno. A few people, but tried and sympathetic; this is the *non plus ultra*. If there is a pretty little figure amongst them so much the better; indeed you may believe that I supposed one present. She it is, perhaps, who makes us love solitary places, recognise the turbulent vanities of the world, and abandon them without regret; because—let us say it even at the risk of making women conceited—there is always a little of the female element in our goodness—when there is goodness in us of course.

Did my monks feel the fair-haired seraph's secret influence? It is lawful to suspect so. Listen to this, which might change the suspicion almost into certainty. Remembering what the prior had said to him in the par-

lour, the seraph had, the same day on which he entered the convent, risked broaching the subject of the scientific journal. And from this had suddenly arisen that great dispute which I have already mentioned. Wherefore? My monks knew very well that nobody could have read their review, since they had not sent it to anyone outside the convent. They did not say so to each other; perhaps they did not even think so, but a new vein of indifference had penetrated the vital circle of the community of San Bruno.

That same week the first examples of our monks' scientific labour appeared finished. I cite as an instance a memoir *on falling stars* by Father Bonaventura, who also threatened another on the physical constitution of the planet Mars; a study *on the circulation of the blood and on molecular change* by Father Tranquillo; some hints on the geological formation of Monte Acuto by Father Otta-

viano, and a dissertation *on Hannibal's passage from Castelnuovo* by Father Anselmo, who, in the capacity of librarian, ought to have been the most learned of the assembly. Father Anacleto did not wish to be behindhand with his colleagues. He had contributed certain notes on prehistoric archaeology put together after his colloquy with the Duke of Francavilla. But as these notes did not as yet furnish any materials for little Father Adelindo's drawings, and as without the drawings of the latter the journal of San Bruno could not be compiled, the worthy prior thought of completing his studies with a description of the excavations of Monte Acuto which would be drawn by the fair seraph, and because the said excavations had yet to be made Father Anacleto advised proceeding with them immediately.

The archaeological expedition was promptly organised. They were following in the Duke of Francavilla's steps, but he was only an

amateur, and our monks desired to go to work seriously. Besides, his Grace the Duke made his excavations in the cave of La Ripa; our monks chose a more distant site on the northern declivity of Monte Acuto, in the witches' cave.

I will not pause to tell you why it was called the witches' cave, leaving you to imagine the popular legends which had assigned that place to the nocturnal assemblies of Beelzebub's friends. Glancing at Father Anacleto's pocket-book, I will tell you instead that, studied from that side, Monte Acuto appeared crowned by banks of tertiary formation, placed horizontally on the vertical strata of the solid chalk belonging to the jurassic period, from which the kernel of that mountain chain was formed. Those banks of solid chalk, or rather of hardened sand, were all full of the shells of ostraceans and other bivalves, such as *Arca diluvii*, *Venus rugosa*, *Terebratula bipartita*, not counting

traces of polypes, of echini and other organic remains difficult of identification.

The side of the mountain was bare, or nearly so; only a few tufts of grass peeped out between the clefts of the rocks, and here and there was a scanty, melancholy looking shrub which seemed to curse the destiny which had stranded it up there. The witches' cave, either from the difficulty of reaching it or its dismal name, had never yet been explored. No one but a shepherd could have been there, or a robber in hiding, and a tiny path, which was more easily perceived at a distance than closely followed, gave evidence of the rarity of visitors.

Our explorers' first business was to widen the path, and in dangerous parts render it safer by cutting some steps in the rock. Meanwhile the prior, followed by the serafin and Father Prospero, proceeded towards the entrance to the cave. But Father Prospero, afflicted with his polysarchy, which appeared

doubly serious since Father Tranquillo had dubbed it with its scientific name, soon protested his inability to follow the two squirrels whom he had accompanied with a fidelity superior to his strength, and, like Moses in sight of the promised land, he sank down near a bush in sight of the cavern which, though only a few steps distant, seemed to him still a long way off.

"Go on! Go on!" he said. "I will recover my breath and overtake you."

And he sat down on a large stone blowing like a pair of bellows.

The fair-haired seraph smiled, left his uncle in that position, which also had its advantages, and followed Father Anacleto along the windings of the stony path to the entrance of the cave.

It presented a wondrous spectacle. The two explorers found themselves in front of an enormous cleft in the rock. More than a cleft, it had the appearance of a piece having

been eaten away, a gigantic corruption of the mountain. Through this aperture you entered a vast hall, whose ceiling of a reddish colour was covered in some places with ferns, and in others, lumps of quartz were to be seen, which glittered in the reflected light of the sun. An enormous mass of stone in the middle of the entrance divided that large aperture, and a plum tree spread its thorny branches round that mass, and already proudly displayed its blossoms. The seraph was struck by the beauty of those delicate tints, which softened the weird horror of the place, and a scream of delight burst from him.

Charming seraph! How young he was! The sight of a flower sent him into raptures. And he also was a beautiful flower, pink and white like the bush before him. If he had looked at himself then in a glass I wager he would have screamed again, but not with joy, rather with fright at seeing himself so handsome—too handsome for a little father

who wished to appear as such to those around.

Father Anacleto, whom I trust you will not blame, approached the plum-tree, gathered a cluster of flowers and courteously offered them to his young companion.

"It is strange," he said at the same time as if in reply to the cry of delight which the blossoming plum-tree had called forth from the seraph, "it is strange to find flowers up here, where it is a wonder even to see a blade of grass."

The seraph accepted the flowering twig without uttering a word. Poor seraph, pity him, for he is quite confused from the thought of his childish exclamation, and from the prior's gallant but scarcely monastic courtesy.

"How quiet it is," he then said, turning his thoughts and his eyes from the place where they stood silent, leaning against the prominences of the stony-mass.

"Yes," answered the prior sadly shaking his head, "there is always a more tranquil place than the solitude in which we live. The convent of San Bruno seemed to us so quiet and here it is still pleasanter."

"But perhaps," added Father Anacleto smiling, "that is because down there we are many; up here we are only two."

"That is true," observed the seraph ingenuously.

And thus saying he involuntarily looked at the prior. Father Anacleto was handsome with his glossy black beard, his large blue eyes, his pale coral lips, and his delicate soft pearl white complexion, which resembled apple-blossom. Besides, he spoke in such a sweet thrilling voice! The seraph had never noticed such a thing before. And this discovery and the thought of having made it troubled him greatly without his knowing why or wherefore.

"Where can my uncle be?" he said all at

once. And he quitted the entrance of the cavern to go towards the mountain slope.

"I will go with your permission," cried the prior, checking him with a gesture. "You are so young, my friend; rest yourself."

The seraph bowed and drew back to let his companion pass. In the glance the prior gave him, he thought he perceived something of reproach, and he almost regretted his involuntary movement. Perhaps, also, he repented of the little fib which had unintentionally escaped him. Had he not seen where his uncle stopped? But oh dear, these young people. When once they begin to get confused!

Father Anacleto descended the path, and the seraph stood still at the mouth of the cave gazing at him. In his eyes the prior no longer wore a monk's tunic at that moment; he was a knight of the thirteenth century and was clothed in the florentine gown. The hood might remain, for that was a

mediæval fashion, common both to monks and knights.

"Father Anacleto!" murmured the seraph. "I wonder what misfortunes have induced him to lead this solitary life? If I had not been so foolishly frightened, I might have asked him. I will not be afraid. Never again!"

Father Prospero, the object of an anxious search, which he was far from suspecting possible, was talking to Father Tranquillo who had joined him a short time before. The good man had paused and sat down at that point in the ascent to recover his breath, and he was still employed in this noisy task when the physician of the San Bruno community made his appearance.

"Come, get up," said Father Tranquillo. "These walks are the best remedy for polysarchy."

"I hope so;" answered Father Prospero. "But do you really think it is such a serious matter?"

"Serious!" that is as it is understood. For instance if you are not incommoded by all this load of oleine and stearine that you have always to carry, certainly the disease is by no means serious."

"Ah, stearine? oleine? And as we are talking of these combustible and illuminating materials, could you tell me, Father Tranquillo, what I could do to get rid of them?"

"It depends on the mode of life! Mode of life! What, in fact is the cause of polysarchy? The remote causes assigned to this discomfort of humanity are: a cold and damp climate, of which there is no question here; a lymphatic temperament, of which, in your case it seems to me, there is no question; finally, a sedentary life and food superabundant and too nourishing. I do not know, dear brother, which of these two causes has had the greater influence on your increase of bulk, because I have not known you long enough, and you have not taken me into

your confidence; but I expect that it is the result of both. However, there are many remedies, and they are all useful whatever may have been the cause of the disease. Bracing mountain air—here it is. Bodily exercise—here it is! That is, I do not see it at present because you are seated; however, by getting here and back to the convent, you will have had a little exercise. I should recommend you besides to take acids; but not vinegar which might cause phlogosis."

"Phlogosis!" exclaimed Father Prospero. "For heaven's sake what creature is that?"

"Don't take any heed of it; it is one of our difficult words with which we endeavour to increase the patient's anxiety and the physician's merits. Say simply inflammation, it is the same as phlogosis. We were speaking of acids; I would add sulfureo-saline waters, those of Seltz and Sedlitz and impress upon you the importance of diet."

"Ah yes, diet! I think the cook at San

Bruno is certainly a very poor one;" observed Father Prospero. "However, so much the better; it is more bearable to be cured in company."

Talking thus Father Prospero was keeping his companion at bay. Do you know why? So as not to let him go on to the cave. Father Prospero was seated in the middle of the path, and in order to let Father Tranquillo pass he must have risen; which he did not much care about, in fact not at all.

At this juncture the prior arrived. Hemmed in before and behind, poor Signor Gentili was compelled to stand up.

"I was afraid some misfortune had befallen you," said Father Anacleto, he also venturing a little fib.

"Oh, no, I was talking medicine with Father Tranquillo, who really possesses a fund of knowledge. Father, you are an eminent medical man, and if you do not cure

me of this superfluous fat the fault will certainly not be yours."

"Forward then, and plenty of exercise," concluded Father Tranquillo. "Let us go and see this cave."

"It is splendid," said the prior.

He also was in a hurry to reach it, and certainly with the laudable intention of being first in the work of excavation. The rest also having made a better path were following on the heels of the three first explorers.

The little band having reached a turn in the path from whence could be seen the opening in the rock which formed the cave's entrance, our travellers beheld the beautiful form of the seraph who had remained there by the stone in the posture in which Father Anacleto had left him.

"A miracle!" cried Father Atanasio. "An apparition."

"The youthful San Bruno!" added Father Ottaviano.

"Say rather Saint Theresa, or some other holy nun," said Father Marcellino.

This feminine comparison, most natural for anyone who had seen the solitary little monk at that moment standing in the entrance to the cave, disquieted Father Prospero very much, for he always feared the discovery of Signorina Adele Ruzzani's secret, his beautiful and capricious niece.

"Yes, indeed," he stammered, "my nephew has a face more like a girl. Happy he who can preserve his youth."

"Do you perhaps regret yours?" asked the prior. "It would be useless to you in the convent of San Bruno."

"Ah, after all," replied Father Prospero, "and even without its being very useful, I think youth—you speak Father Tranquillo, who know so many things. Is youth so worthless as our good prior seems to think?"

"Youth," said Father Tranquillo, "is one

of the elements of health, I might almost say the only element. At least," he added. qualifying the phrase, " we could maintain so with some plausibility. In fact everything that we do for our health when youth is past is only a succession of palliatives, more or less happy to conceal the absence of a necessary element."

They all talked with great composure of palliatives and of health considering they were all so young, the oldest scarcely more than forty. And it was strange to see them, and still stranger to see that fair-haired seraph, dressed as monks. It was strange, I say, to see so many men still young and already weary of the storms of life; weary of the storms and so happy, so cheerful in the little company of shipwrecked persons who had gathered together in a fold of the Appenines. The contrast between the great and little world, between natural and artificial society could not be more marked. And the

advantage was on the side of artificial society for the simple reason that natural society forms itself, while artificial is fashioned by us and we are contented with it as long as it lasts.

But after all is it not the same in the great world? Humanity exists with all its thoughtlessness and all its arbitraryness; but we pass away. What is the use of vexing ourselves about it? Is it not better to let things go on as they will, and remain as they like? To change matters is impossible. Let those who will talk against the selfishness of the little world, and against the extravagances of artificial society. To the right of tyranny is opposed the right of resistance; and both are natural.

You will already have perceived, my readers, that I yield a little to the influence of the circle in which I move. I am with the monks, and I dig the soil with them.

CHAPTER X.

The little fair-haired monk was very far from suspecting the great impression he had made on his companions. I do not deny that beauty is conscious; but a woman who disguises herself as a man is aware that she loses half her attractions. And Brother Adelindo did not take any heed of those spontaneous bursts of admiration which his seraph's face produced from the reformed of San Bruno as they sometimes jokingly called themselves. He trusted in his youthful assurance not to be discovered, and enjoyed the novelty of the life without knowing how it would end.

But did he really not know? Are we not to believe that the little fair-haired monk had a *but?* No, my readers, do not believe it. But for the present come with me. The best

way of learning the truth is to proceed with the narrative.

Having entered the hall of the cave, the recluses of San Bruno admired that sample of Mother Nature's architecture and all the ornaments with which that incomparable artist had adorned it. Then, like those who visit a house and wish to see everything from beginning to end, they went to explore the gloomy recesses of the place. The cave extended for half a mile in the interior of the mountain, sometimes narrower, sometimes wider, but always in a straight line like a great rent in the mountain. What was the cause of that rent? Perhaps it might be attributed to the last eruption of the volcano which had upheaved that calcareous stratum from the depths of the ancient seas; perhaps it was the slower and less obtrusive effect of erosion of the water. I will not puzzle myself about it, but leave the solution of the problem to Father Anacleto's studies.

Here and there our explorers came upon some weird spectacles which would have been a real godsend for Brother Adelindo's sketch-book, if our artist-seraph had had a ray of sunshine in there instead of the fitful light of a pine wood torch. The way sometimes ascended between two kinds of stalagmites which clustered one over the other, like little columns in a cloister; elsewhere the roof was rounded into tiny alabaster cupolas, or elongated into corbels and festoons, suspended in the air, so that it was a delight to see them. They very frequently met with basins for holy water along the rugged walls, examples illustrative of the ancient adage: *gutta cavat lapidem.* But the greatest marvel of all was a kind of throne formed on a projection of the rock by a large stalagmite of circular shape, and crowned by a semicircle of stalactites which represented a canopy. The little fair-haired monk as usual screamed with ingenuous admiration; he ran and placed

himself on the throne and remained there standing, as charming to behold as one of Donatello's saints in his marble niche. And Father Ottaviano had immediately suggested naming that spot "Brother Adelindo's pulpit." The rest approved, whilst the seraph, who had blushed as red as a strawberry, hastened to jump down from that shaft of a column, fearing someone should take it into his head to carry him off by force with the laudable intention of facilitating his descent.

Recreation was over, and labour now began. I have already mentioned that Father Anacleto had gone to the Witches' Cave to search for some specimens of pre-historic archaeology, potsherds, stone weapons, fossil bones and so on. The cave must have been inhabited, like the rest in the Appenines, in those ages when man had not yet learned how to build stone houses, and the huts did not afford sufficient shelter from the wild beasts of the woods, or from the assaults of

neighbouring tribes. Traces of pre-historic man were also evident in the Witches' Cave. At such a height of arable soil, in a rocky cavity like that, the strata of earth appeared to be very deep, and certainly it had not formed itself by denudation, for the stone was too solid, and the water permeated in so small a quantity that it scarcely sufficed for the preservation of the ferns, with which parts of the roof were covered.

There remained a doubt. Had the cave been used as a dwelling place, or merely for burial? Those miserable representatives of the human species, in the first ages of the quarternary epoch, used to live in caves from whence they had driven out the wild beasts; but in some of them, less easy of access, and further from the places whence they procured food, they accomplished the funeral rites after having therein buried their dead. Often, either because places of refuge were scarce, or scanty the reverence for the

tombs, one and the same cave was both habitation and sepulchre, and the hearth destined for the funeral banquet was the same domestic hearth which, later, burned on the dead man's grave.

Father Anacleto proposed at a future time determining to which of the two species the Witches' Cave belonged. First of all, it was necessary to discover traces of man, of whatever nature they might be. And our explorer, having glanced all round to ascertain by the inclination of the walls, on which side was the greatest depth of soil, resolved on beginning the excavations not far from the centre of the hall and towards the interior of the mountain. Meanwhile in the most distant corner an improvised fireplace was being erected under Brother Giocondo's directions, assisted by Brother Prospero, to warm up the provisions which were to serve for breakfast.

The first blows of the spade followed each

other quickly, and were given with much confidence. But as the soil became upturned the work gradually proceeded with more caution, Father Anacleto desiring to examine all the relics which might be discovered, and, above all, to find in the vertical section of the soil the succession of beds which would be easily recognised by their difference of colour and composition, sometimes corresponding to ages of men, but more often to degrees and periods of civilisation in those indigent peoples who preceded the arrival and distribution of the Pelasgic race in Italy.

In fact, they began to find in the first bed broken pieces of utensils whose deep red colour gave evidence of assiduous baking, and their circular forms, together with some traces of ornamentation in outline, indicated that the manufacture of pottery had reached a certain degree of perfection. And this might denote that the inhabitants of the

cave, still semi-barbarous, mixed with more civilised people, either inhabitants of the plain, or come there from a distant country where, in comparison, the useful arts of life were sufficiently advanced. Proceeding with the excavations, the potsherds were of rougher shapes and less well baked, till they had the appearance of scarcely having touched the fire, evident sign of home manufacture, where commerce was unknown, and nothing was understood of bringing an art to perfection. As to wrought bones and stone weapons there was not a trace of any to be found, which was natural enough so long as no tomb was discovered. In fact stone weapons and bones used for domestic purposes, being at that time exceedingly precious, they were also rare, and it was as much as they could do to place one by the side of the corpse so as not to deprive the dead of that which had been dearest and most useful during life.

Father Anacleto explained all these things

while superintending the prosecution of the work. The strata succeeded each other in a series of alternately dark and light soil. Suddenly the spades gave a dull sound as though they had struck something dry and firm which shivered into fragments, and a grey laminated substance came to light, easily recognised as a bed of ashes.

Precisely here lay the doubt. Were these ashes the remains of a funeral banquet or indications of a domestic hearth? Questioned by the fair-haired seraph, who took as much delight in that exploration as his uncle in the preparations for breakfast, Father Anacleto said he believed in the funeral banquet rather than in the domestic hearth. And he gave his reasons, viz., the position of the deposit, which did not correspond to the natural position of a fireplace. The cave being inhabited by a family or an aggregate of consanguineous families under the authority of one chief it was not credible

that the fireplace would be situated almost in the centre to give annoyance to everyone; whereas the presence of ashes, considered as the remains of a funeral banquet, was quite well explained, if we bear in mind the custom of kindling a fire on the tomb of the relative whose funeral was being celebrated.

Near this accumulation of ashes were discovered more potsherds and bones of domestic animals, but broken in irregular fragments, and here and there slightly indented. The banqueters must certainly have gnawed round them.

The attention of the explorers was gradually increasing, but it culminated when, at about the depth of a metre and a half, the spades gave a metallic sound, at the same time discovering the grey and rugged surface of one side of a stone.

The prior would not permit this large stone to be raised at once, but excavated the earth all round, and enlarged the hole. In

consequence of this operation it was clearly shown that this big horizontal stone was placed on four others in a vertical position.

A religious silence reigned in the cave. Something which had been buried five or ten thousand years ago was now to be brought to light.

"It is your turn, Brother Adelindo," said the prior. "Copy the shape of this sepulchre before it is disturbed."

The fair-haired seraph took out his sketch book and with a few strokes drew the bottom of the hole, on the edge of which he was seated. As he put the finishing touches to the drawing all pulled together and the large stone was removed.

First of all appeared—that is, let us be accurate—nothing appeared; for the black mould which filled the hole cannot be called anything, to see at least. But, carefully removing it, some fragments of bone were felt; then seen, in which and by their shape

and position Father Anacleto recognised the ribs of a human skeleton. Mingled with these they found several small bones of irregular shape and various sizes, which might belong to the carpus and meta carpus of the hands. Thus it was in fact, and they also discovered the phalanges of the fingers; a sign that the body had been placed there with the hands crossed on the breast.

Continuing the work with greater care so as not to disturb the anatomical distribution of the parts, they discovered the radii and the humeri, then the skull, and so on all the members in the position of contraction into which the body had been forced in order to make it fit into that little hole.

The fair-haired seraph had again taken up his sketch-book, and these remains of a body gathered to its eternal rest were, by his pencil, portrayed on paper, after which, piece by piece, the skeleton was removed from the grave and placed in a basket. The skull was

very well preserved, and the whiteness and porousness of the bony tissue gave evidence of great antiquity no less than of the aridity of the soil. Besides, it cleaved to the tongue —that is to say it left on it the same impression, together with a certain dryness which particular sour or bitter substances leave on the lips. You, my kind readers, will exclaim with surprise and horror at the thought that, if these bones cleave to the tongue, it must mean that the tongue approached them. But what is to be done? Learned men are all like that, and there is no means of altering them. They know that that sour, dry taste in the surface of the bones is a sign of antiquity, and the verification of so important a fact is surely worth a little sacrifice. Besides, have you not seen in pictures Saint Mary Magdalene in the desert? She also kisses a skull, and without the excuse of a love of science. Yet not one of you is horrified at the sight of such a thing. Pray do

not, then, be horrified if you see Father Anacleto approach his tongue to the frontal or parietal bones of a poor creature buried fifty or a hundred centuries ago.

Let us proceed. The sutures of the cranium, very visible in their indentations, indicated a young person; the medium height of the skeleton and the shape of the pelvis argued the skeleton of a woman. The teeth were small, pearly white, and the enamel was intact—a marvellous fact, but not uncommon in similar discoveries. By the side of the skull, and just at the height of the ear, was a small vase of black clay, in which was found a thick, reddish substance. It was the ochre earth with which our ancient progenitors, not unlike the modern savages of America, were accustomed to dye their bodies. Another peculiarity identified this as a female skeleton, and it was the absence of weapons in the tomb, whilst instead there were sundry needles and bodkins made from

the bones of deer, the former recognised by the eye, the latter by the circular head. About fifty pierced shells, which lay in a heap in the earth not far distant from the first vertebræ, showed that the woman had been buried with her necklace, and that she was certainly not of low degree, since she possessed a necklace of this kind made of materials which must have been brought from a remote place. You must, in fact, remember that the cave was in the Appenines, and several days' journey from the sea.

All these relics, carefully gathered together from the bottom of the hole, were severally deposited in a basket. Father Anacleto saw in them the foundation of a prehistoric museum of San Bruno. Vast as was the Witches' Cave, it might yield treasures to science. For instance, fifty or so skeletons placed erect with suitable ligaments of wire, and arranged in proper order, with all the utensils, weapons, amulets and ornaments

found in the tombs, might have revealed a fine page of history concerning the primitive Italian tribes, and have given birth to ingenious inductions. Truly, a museum might be formed capable of attracting many antiquarians to the monastery of San Bruno; but, as you are aware, those eccentric recluses did not welcome the visits of their fellows, and preferred keeping their science to themselves.

Meanwhile the little fair-haired monk would have finished the drawings of all that rich scientific collection. While listening to Father Anacleto's discourses he rejoiced in secret at possessing that small talent for drawing, a talent which made no noise, but which on the contrary was therefore all the more useful, and which changed him, a youth received into the convent by favour, into an indispensable personage.

You ought to have seen him, our seraph, seated on the edge of the trench, his legs

crossed, the sketch-book on his knees, pencil in hand. The subject of his drawings was a gloomy one. For the first time in his life Adelindo Ruzzani used his pencil to copy skeletons. But what would one not do for love of science?

And the monks were all round him, partly to see the strokes of his pencil, partly to contemplate that charming little monk's profile, which was so like that of a beautiful girl.

"Good!" "Bravo!" "Wonderful!" were the words with which the artist was encouraged. I wager that Raphael d'Urbino did not receive so many encomiums from the persons who visited his studio to see him work. But I am also disposed to admit that Raphael would have had just as many if instead of himself, he had been, for example, la Fornarina.

CHAPTER XI.

The archæological excursion to the Witches' Cave seemed, if indeed it were possible, to draw still closer the fraternal bonds of the San Bruno family. On their return my pretended monks were more friends than ever. If only by the way in which they wished each other alternately good-morning and good-night, one would have said that they were always embracing, not only in the discreet dimness of the passages, but in broad daylight. My pretended monks all moved in the same orbit of which Adelindo Ruzzani was the centre. But why call him any longer Adelindo? Let us say Adele Ruzzani, since each of these monks had divined the woman. We will not, however, say Adele when they are all together, and that for a very simple reason. Each of the inmates of San Bruno, as I have said, had divined the woman, but

not one had the boldness to announce his discovery to his companion. Each kept or tried to keep it to himself, which state of things has been by the ancients expressed by the happy simile of rowing with the stream.

Brother Adelindo! The little monk, the fair-haired seraph! All gathered round him; all were occupied with him, and little or not at all with the various employments in which the convent had previously quietly busied itself. The journal, as you can imagine, did not get on very fast; they wrote little, and did not meditate at all in their solitary cells; the instruments in the observatory slept on their stands or in their velvet cases; the retorts in the chemical laboratory were lying on the stoves without fire; the books in the library no longer awaited the monks, but rats and moths. God forgive me if I am listening to the voice of calumny, but it was thought that even the prior took little heed

of the duties of his office, and did not even examine the accounts as an economist should.

But what did all that matter so long as the monks of San Bruno were pleased? Heaven assists cheerful people, says the proverb. Happy my recluses who were still in the gay stage, generally the shortest of the drama of human passions.

Less cheerful was Brother Giocondo, in spite of his name. And why? You know, my readers, that our lay brother spent a great part of the day at the convent entrance by the bridge over which one must pass to penetrate into the hermitage of San Bruno. Now this daily duty was the cause of our lay brother being less subject to the beneficent influence of the fair-haired seraph, and thus more exposed to external annoyances.

And do not doubt that there were many. Every day inquisitive persons who wished to

visit the convent appeared by tens. Sometimes they were companies of merry-makers, or riding parties of foreigners more or less genuine; others were gentlemen disguised who asked to see the prior to present a petition, a memorial, or something of the kind. Amongst others one came (and Brother Giocondo revealed his suspicion that it was a woman, though an ugly one he hastened to add) who asked permission to confess to Father Anacleto.

"There is no confessing here," the lay brother had replied shrugging his shoulders indignantly. "Go to real monks."

"Then what convent is this?" questioned the importunate visitor.

"The convent of fools. Is not this the name given it by you others at Castelnuovo?" answered Brother Giocondo, who had scented the inquisitive citizen under a penitent's garb. "Go, go, and roast your sins on another gridiron."

Brother Giocondo's surly manners corresponded to a strict order given by Father Anacleto, who was first annoyed, then anxious about this continual coming and going of suspicious, inquisitive people. Usually foreigners were not admitted, but as they appeared seldom, a tourist recognised as such, was from courtesy permitted to visit the convent. But the frequency of visits could no longer be explained by the assumed character of travellers. They were evidently indiscreet Castelnuovesians, come to spy out other people's affairs. And even this would only have been a nuisance more or less endurable according to circumstances and moods. But Father Anacleto suspected something behind and hastened to prohibit entrance to everyone without exception.

Peasants who carried anything to the convent had to content themselves with dealing with the lay brother; neither was it necessary that they should come in couples to carry a

basket of eggs or of fruit. Then if anybody desired to speak to Father Atanasio or Father Marcellino, he might remain on the bridge and take a breath of fresh air till the lay brother returned with the person sent for, or, as more oftened happened, with his refusal to appear.

Once however Father Prospero was asked for; and not only did the latter not refuse to shew himself at the parlour on the bridge, but he did not express any surprise at being sent for. What was the meaning of this? It meant that the visit was not unexpected. Also that it had been announced in a certain letter received the day before; a letter over which he had pondered a long time and had not allowed the fair-haired seraph to read. Signor Prospero Gentili had his little secrets! To be frank, the good man began to be bored with all this daily buzzing of the apocryphal friars round the fair little monk, who without doubt was the most apocryphal of all.

And the mysterious letter which ten days before would have disturbed him so much, was now thankfully received, like the announcement of a friend to one who feels dull in the country, or better still like the voice of a rescuer to a drowning man. Whence we see clearly that everything may turn out useful and pleasing, if it only comes at the right time. Let us follow Father Prospero and we also shall see the person who made him run so quickly to the parlour on the bridge. But you are quite capable of having guessed, my readers, and already murmur the name of—of course, you have guessed, it was he.

Signor Prospero entered the room with determination. But when he stood in front of his visitor and saw the latter looking at him half curiously, half jestingly, he remained there paralysed and confused. On his way to the colloquy, the poor man had forgotten one thing; I mean that snuff-colored tunic

which swathed his respectable circumference. And thinking of it then under the scrutiny of those searching eyes, he felt how ridiculous he appeared in his monk's habit.

The other waited till the lay brother had left and the parlour-door was shut behind Signor Prospero; then he sank down on one of the leather chairs which ornamented the room, and burst out laughing.

"Ah, Signor Prospero—no, I mean, Father Prospero, allow me—have pity on me—excuse this little outburst of hilarity. But is it really you? Do I dream or do I wake? as they say in tragedy. Did I come here, to see you in tunic and cowl? Pray how many vows have you taken? Will you permit me, most reverend Father Prospero, to kiss your holy hand?"

Signor Prospero let this storm of raillery subside and only answered it by sadly shaking his head.

"Superior power, Signor Cavaliere,

superior power!" he then said penitently. "Could I attempt to oppose that little vixen's will?"

"Nonsense! A guardian, a man of a certain age like you—almost a commendatore! Not to have enough strength of mind to overrule a girl's caprice! Above all not to warn me of anything!"

"Yes, yes; it is all very well for you to talk!" answered Signor Prospero. "But you ought to put yourself in my position—in my position then, not now!" he added with a simplicity almost amounting to quaintness. "You ought to consider, Signor Cavaliere, that it was too late to oppose her, to have my own way. Just imagine! I was a bachelor and have remained so because I was too fond of my sister's daughter. That dear little imp was my right eye and I have always been short-sighted with the left. Adelina was six months old when I began to obey her implicitly in everything. She hardly knew me

before she began to pull my whiskers and I never took it amiss. Then as she grew up, she took delight in teasing me, in tearing my newspaper to make little birds and cocked hats, to put my writing desk in confusion, to overturn my inkbottle in order to paint her young ladies dressed in the latest fashions, to steal my night-cap to make a bed for her cat. But to tell you the truth she was very fond of me and had a certain way of saying 'dear uncle.' It was she who embroidered my slippers; she who made the watch-case which hangs by my bedside; she made my velvet cap with the gold tassel. I thought of marrying—yes even this crooked idea came into my head. Adelina was then eleven. I asked her esteemed advice and she answered me in the negative. 'Uncle Prospero,' she said, 'what do you want with a wife? Am I not here to take care of your things, to embroider your slippers and to see that you want for nothing, neither fresh water in the

crystal bottle, nor a bouquet of roses in the china vase?' You must know, Signor Cavaliere, that I am very fond of roses and like to have some in my room all the year round. I have accustomed myself not to think of marrying; I did then, I have always done, whatever my all-powerful darling wished. In short, Signor Cavaliere, tell me, when one has taken the habit of obeying, how can one rule?"

"Happy are you, who are not married, for you would have fallen from Scylla to Charybdis!" observed the Cavaliere with his accustomed sententiousness. "But enough, that which is done cannot be undone. Now we must see how we can get out of this scrape."

"Pray tell me; pray suggest; I ask nothing better."

"It is no easy matter. In town they grumble a good deal, as you may imagine. I learned it at once. I know everything, it is

my duty to know everything. At first I would hardly believe it, but was obliged to surrender to the certainty of my information. I kept silence as long as possible, almost at the risk of being thought ignorant. But at last, though not admitting the fact, I could not altogether deny it. The rumour spread, Signor Prospero; the Gamberinis told me of it with inexpressible delight, and now it will be a pretty business to repair the consequences."

Then Signor Prospero saw all the gravity of the situation, and was quite overwhelmed by it.

"If it could only be denied!" he exclaimed.

"That might be possible, even at the risk of being disbelieved. But then, if there are no proofs, our no is as weighty as yes said by half the world. At any rate, you must lose no time. You must go away immediately, leave for Turin, and stay there a month; this seems to me the best thing you

can do. Meantime, I would manage to pave the way, I would dispel suspicions, and oppose certainty to unfounded gossip. As to your departure from here, do not think about it, I will arrange that. I shall send a carriage with a trustworthy person, who will conduct you to the second station beyond Castelnuovo. You will leave at night, and no one will see you. What do you think of this?"

"Oh, she will never consent to it!" answered Signor Prospero. "When she has taken anything into her head—"

"But pray, Signor Prospero, may I know what your pretty niece has taken into her head? Does she want to live in a convent? At least of nuns, I hope! And have not these silly monks perceived anything?"

"How am I to know? She has bewitched them all, as she has bewitched me. They call her the little father. Little father here, little father there, it is always a *fête* for her;

they do not leave her for a moment. In the hours of recreation, she paints out of doors, under the arches of the portico. And they are all there looking at her; one holds her brushes, another hands her the colours, another runs about for her, another praises her, another disappears. It is like being in a house where there is a child, when all become children like him, and more than him if necessary."

"And the prior?"

"The prior is the only one who has not lost his head. At least, he is the most serious of them all."

"Say the most dangerous, Signor Prospero."

"Why? Do you know him by chance?"

"Not personally; but I have seen his photograph, and have also received some information about him. He is a native of Ferrara."

"Ah, I might have guessed that by his accent."

"But still more from his eccentricity. This convent of his, of monks, who are not monks, is worthy of Ariosto's giddy brain. He was a cavalry officer. He gave up military service to throw himself into politics, of which he soon tired. He has had plenty of love affairs. One fine day he took it into his head to reform the world, and he was destined to end here in a kind of madhouse. A handsome man, I do not deny; but so much the more dangerous; don't you think so?"

"If he were rich!" exclaimed Signor Prospero.

"He is not rich enough to aspire to your niece's hand; neither does he possess a title which in these cases is equivalent to wealth. But then mind, Signor Prospero, he is a quiet madman, which is the same as saying an incurable one. Is it likely that he would leave his Eutopia now to get married? These philosophers, these reformers, are all obstinate. Even when they are convinced that

they have acted foolishly, self-love bids them be firm. Mark my words, if you remain here, I prophesy that your niece, with her odd ideas, will fall in love with this prior, or another of the community. Opportunity makes a man a thief, and you, Signor Prospero—"

"Do not terrify me, for Heaven's sake!" interrupted the poor uncle with a gesture of despair. "Perhaps your fear is exaggerated. These gentlemen are very civil, perfect gentlemen, and even if they should imagine, or had already imagined—

"I like the correction you made spontaneously," replied the other. "Unconsciously you spoke the truth. Now then, Signor Prospero, just think. Do you believe that when they have discovered your niece to be a woman, they will come and tell you, so that you may have time to consider what is to be done?"

"I see—I see," murmured Signor Pros-

pero; "but what is to be done now? I do not know which way to turn."

"Follow my advice, speak to the young lady, try and persuade her. If you fail, I will see to it."

"You, Signor Cavaliere?"

"Yes, I. Someone must find a way out of the difficulty."

"Ah, Signor Cavaliere, you give me new life; do manage it, do find this blessed way."

"But let us understand each other, on one condition."

"A condition?"

"Certainly. Do you expect me to rack my brains to keep up the dignity of government in this affair, without a just reward?"

"Explain your meaning."

"Immediately. First answer a question. What is your view of the marriage which was arranged?"

"But—the same as before. Do you distrust me?"

"Well, if I did, you ought not to think it so very odd. After having fled from Castelnuovo in that way without letting me know anything about it. Don't make excuses; you have none that are valid. With all your uncle's weakness, you could not but know that I should be in a fix, and that that poor duke would ask me for an explanation. He is the only descendant of one of the first families of Italy and indeed of Europe, remember. You cannot deal with him as with the first comer. What could I answer him? How account for your departure, nay worse, your flight? I did what I could; I scoured the country. Good Heavens, if you had known"—

"Ah, yes, you are right; if I had known"—

"I know there would always have been some means of justification. For did you not accompany your niece?"

"Of course, in fact, what was I telling you

just now? I being with my niece, it seems to me—"

"Yes, but mind, Signor Prospero; these reasons have weight with an intelligent person. They were useless for the people of Castelnuovo. You must always be able to tell them that the thing is not true. They believe or not as they like. They have not to marry her! And when your niece is Duchess of Francavilla, I should like to see what good it will do them to maintain that she has been in a convent of monks. But to return to ourselves. You assure me then that you are still of the same opinion?"

"Certainly, Cavaliere, certainly. Pray believe I desire nothing else."

"And the young lady? Have you spoken to her yet? Has she shown any other inclination?"

"No, she knows nothing and has revealed nothing. She came here out of caprice,

from sudden curiosity—you know Signor Cavaliere, when women wish for a thing— "

"And when they have uncles, who have no will but theirs—I understand Signor Prospero, I understand. Then in conclusion, you will speak to your niece and try to persuade her. You must do it, it is necessary as a preliminary. If she says she will not leave, you will send me a few lines by a confidential messenger of mine who will come for them to-morrow. I will arrange the rest as soon as I receive your esteemed letter. Ah Signor Prospero, Signor Prospero! How much you have to worry you!"

"Patience, Signor Cavaliere!"

Cavaliere Tiraquelli said no more. With a dignified gesture he gave Signor Prospero his absolution and quitted the parlour to retrace his steps to Castelnuovo Bedonia.

CHAPTER XII.

"What does he think of doing?" said Signor Prospero to himself as he slowly returned through the avenue of ash trees. "If he does not manage to get me out of this place, I shall never succeed. Speak to Adelinda? persuade her? I must have been mad! That little devil would be capable of doing anything: of falling in love with Father Anacleto as she fell in love with the convent of fools, from hearing about it. No, no; I will not say a word to her; I will write to him just as if I had spoken in vain, indeed I will prepare the letter to-day, so as to have nothing to worry me to-morrow. Most worthy Signor Cavaliere, it is your affair, you may see to it. This you will learn to-morrow from my esteemed letter."

With these and other thoughts of the same kind, Signor Prospero arrived at the convent.

The clock in the court-yard pointed to half-past two. Not one of the monks was to be seen, and this seemed very strange to Signor Prospero who had left most of them sunning themselves in the court-yard, when he was called to the parlour by the bridge. But he thought it still more strange not to find his nephew or niece if you prefer to say so; he went to the door of her cell and knocked repeatedly but received no answer.

He then went along the corridor as far as the entrance of the chapter-house. There he heard a confused noise of voices. He turned the handle to enter, but the door was fastened on the inside. What was the meaning of this novelty? Why did the monks shut themselves in when there was no one besides themselves in the convent. Father Prospero thought the door was fastened by mistake and knocked.

Soon after he heard the steps of somebody coming to open. The chain was let down,

the door half-opened, and Father Atanasio's face appeared in the crack.

"Ah, is it you, Father Prospero?"

"Yes, it is I. There is a chapter being held it seems."

"There is," answered Father Atanasio without opening the door wide and in a tone of evident embarrassment.

"Good!" replied Father Prospero; "here I am then to take part in it."

"Excuse me," answered the other; "grave matters are being discussed, and you are still a novice." Father Prospero was dumbfounded by this observation, as prudent as it was unexpected.

"True, by Jove!" he said, "I am still a novice and have no voice in chapter. Of course my nephew is not there either?"

"Of couse not; go then and wait patiently," answered Father Atanasio. "In half an hour we shall have finished."

And with these words Father Atanasio dis-

missed him, shutting the door in Father Prospero's face ; Father in name but novice in fact, despite his fifty-eight winters.

" She is not in chapter," muttered Father Prospero going away. " Where the devil can she be ? "

Thus saying he proceeded to the end of the corridor where was the side entrance to the church.

The church, as you know, had been converted into a library. Between the church and the chapter-house was the sacristy. Father Prospero then entered the library hoping there to find that provoking little fair-haired seraph, who had disappeared.

There was not a soul in the church. And this was accounted for as regarded the monks, who were holding a chapter, but it did not account for the little monk who was not in chapter.

" Where on earth can she be ? " asked Father Prospero again.

The enquiry was certainly made out loud and someone certainly heard the sound of his voice, for directly afterwards Father Prospero heard his name called, accompanied by a prolonged but subdued whistle. The sound came from above. And before believing in a call from the Lord, for in truth he did not think himself in such favour as to deserve one, Father Prospero raised his eyes to the gallery which ran all round the cornice as far as the arch of the presbytery. Just up there, through the crack of a door which opened on to the gallery appeared the seraph's little golden head.

"Ah!" cried Signor Prospero. "At last!"

But the other cut him short, by placing a finger on her lips and repeating the whistle; then almost as a comment on the injunction, pointed towards the interior.

Father Prospero knew what you already know, viz., that on the other side of the

sacristy was the chapter-house. Close by there was the passage leading to the sacristy; but the door of this was shut. In that same passage however was the staircase leading to the belfry, which was transformed into an observatory; and half-way up on one side, this lead to the cornice in the church, on the other to certain old ruinous chambers which were probably used by the ancient monks of San Bruno as a drying place. And they were exactly over the sacristy, chapter house and first floor cells.

"Ah, I see!" said Father Prospero to himself. "She wants to hear what the monks are saying in their secret assembly. Woman's curiosity! But I should like to know how she can manage to hear this discussion from the upper story."

Father Prospero did not know, and the monks on their side had forgotten, that the chambers on the upper story had a wooden floor without any other obstacle of bricks and

mortar between them and the rooms on the ground floor. Neither did the seraph know it before, but had just discovered it. You know the proverb, "Seek and ye shall find." The seraph had sought; it was right that he should find. But why had he sought? You must know, kind readers, that the same morning Brother Adelindo had noticed that the recluses of San Bruno greeted each other with a certain appearance of secrecy, and that they whispered certain words in passing each other. Moreover some of them had looked at him more affectionately and sadly than usual. The seraph had already formed his opinion of the glances, the affection, and the sadness of his companions; but that day it seemed to him that sadness predominated. Was there, then, something the matter? The seraph suspected so when he knew that the monks were that very day to hold a chapter.

"Brother," Father Anacleto had said to

him, "you will forgive us if we leave you. We have an assembly demanded by four of our companions to consider a pressing matter, so they say. You are a novice—"

"And may not be present, you mean?" the seraph had retorted. "It is most reasonable. As you please."

Most reasonable! As you please! But in his own mind the fair-haired seraph did not think it at all reasonable that there should be a discussion, and probably about him (his conscience told him so), in which he was not to take part. At the same time he made up his mind that they should do nothing without his good pleasure.

Therefore hardly had the monks begun to repair to the chapter-house than he, adroitly running round the corridor, had slipped into the church. He sought a place whence he could hear something of all those mysterious discussions, and wandered about, rather more attractive in appearance, but not less eager

than the *leo rugiens quaerens quem devoret* mentioned in Scripture.

As we have already seen, the hall of the chapter-house had one door opening into the corridor and another into the sacristy which was adjoining the church. Now on the side of the church the sacristy was closed, certainly in anticipation of that secret assembly.

Having entered the little passage between the church and that closed door, a bright idea struck the fair-haired seraph. Certainly if seraphs do not have bright ideas who would? My readers, I ask you.

In that passage was the staircase leading to the belfry. The fair-haired seraph had been up that staircase to go to Father Bonaventura's observatory, and in going up there he had also seen half way two doors, one of which opened on to the cornice in the church, the other into the drying place. To think of that drying place and mount the belfry stairs was the affair of a moment. In those two or

three rooms built in the roof the new recluses of San Bruno had collected all the lumber of the monastery, the church benches, altar hangings, dusty, threadbare cloths, short candlesticks of gilt wood and so forth. The floor was of wood, but so also was the ceiling of the sacristy and chapter-house. What then? Well, the fair-haired seraph swiftly ascended the staircase, and two minutes afterwards was walking on tiptoe on that blessed floor, which promised his curiosity so much satisfaction. Really at first our seraph did not seem at all pleased with that floor. The boards were double, and the monks' voices did not reach his ear distinctly. But after having groped all round as well as that heap of antiquities which encumbered the room permitted, he perceived a hole, wide enough for even a seraph's fist to pass through. That hole, cunningly pierced near the angle made by two beams in the floor joined together, looked almost on to the

centre of the hall of the chapter-house, and was the means not only whereby one could hear everything that was said down there, but of seeing eight or ten of the twenty-four carved wood stalls which were ranged round the wall. As to the chief stall, which was that of the prior, it could be seen in full. How had that hole been made? Was it the useless labour of a rat who had hoped to get into a pantry through a decayed beam? Or was it the useful work of another novice who was anxious to learn the secrets of the San Bruno chapter-house? The fair-haired seraph did not pause to consider, but gratefully welcomed that round aperture, and first looked through it, then listened.

Just then the monks were taking their seats, and the fair-haired seraph could see Father Anacleto, who had buried himself in his stall, with its inlaid back and its arms like reversed corbels.

The fair seraph's heart beat quickly. He felt he was not acting honourably in spying out the secrets of others like that. But really he had a presentiment that they were talking of him down there, and presentiments seldom deceive us. However, to set his conscience at rest, he had reasoned with himself thus—

"If they talk about me it is right that I should know what they say. If they talk of anything else I shall perceive it at once, and shall go away immediately."

Whilst he was settling his dilemma the monks were beginning their discussion.

"Father Restituto," said the prior, "you have made a proposition"—

"Not I alone," interrupted Father Restituto. "Father Agapito, Father Costanzo, and Father Ilarione have made it also."

"It is strange," observed Father Anselmo, turning to his right-hand neighbour, who was Father Marcellino, "it is strange that

Father Restituto's three supporters are all new-comers."

"The last to arrive was Gambastorta," answered Father Marcellino.

But his answer and Father Anselmo's observation, both whispered, did not reach the little monk's ear, though it was very sharp.

"Good," said the prior meanwhile. "You are then four. Explain your reasons. Our brothers will listen to them, and will in their wisdom determine what is to be done."

"Well then," began Father Restituto, "to speak after the manner of the ancient monks of San Bruno, I would say that there is scandal, or the beginning of scandal, in our community. But since we are not monks like those of old, and we are not restricted to one kind of phraseology, I will say quietly but frankly that by reason of a certain intrusion contrary to all our customs, indeed of the principle of our foundation, our community runs grave risk of being subverted."

"That is very serious," remarked Father Anacleto, "and I as prior ought to apply a speedy remedy."

"We hope so," observed Father Ilarione.

At that moment there was a knock at the door.

"They are knocking from the corridor. Who can it be?" said Father Atanasio.

"Father Prospero or Father Adelindo," said Father Marcellino.

"Father Prospero perhaps," observed the prior. "As to the little father, I warned him just now that, being a novice, he could not join the chapter. I should have told Father Prospero so if I had met him."

"And now what are we to do?" asked Father Atanasio.

"You go, brother. You are nearest the door," said the prior to him. "Tell him he is a novice, and he must have patience if we do not admit him."

The discussion was suspended for a few

minutes. The fair-haired seraph profited by this interruption to move from his uncomfortable position and take breath. Meanwhile he thought and thought about this mysterious proposition made by Father Restituto and his worthy companions. Mysterious! Truly it was not very mysterious. Those hints at scandal, at the peril the community was in of being dissolved, and that by reason of an intrusion contrary to the customs of the convent, could only concern him, the charming little monk. And these new-comers were just the ones who supported Father Restituto. Fine specimens indeed! The seraph knew something of them. The latest arrivals in the community, they had shown themselves the most assiduous in their attentions to him.

Little monk! little monk! Even you, excuse the liberty your historiographer is taking, even you do not possess an ounce of common sense. Why go and poke yourself

in there? Do you not know that a woman cannot conceal herself, and that the best disguise, even if it dissimulates the form perfectly, is not sufficient to suppress the secret *quid*, that indiscribable something which makes her presence felt? They say that at the birth of Eve Nature was stirred to her very depths; the atmosphere was steeped in soft vapours, the plants grew more luxuriantly, the flowers were painted with more vivid colours. It may or may not have been so. We will leave poets to determine. But the fact remains that scarcely had Eve issued from the Creator's hands than Adam awoke from his sleep. And here the Biblical text contains an allegory of which my professors of Biblical science made me understand all the grandeur. A woman's presence makes itself felt; there are, in her, certain delicate sentiments which speak a language unknown to our senses, and this language our senses understand without having learned it; a

miracle which has not yet taken place in the case of Latin and Greek. Besides, woman has this influence over us; to make us, at first, more tender, anxious to appear good, courteous, gallant, witty, and so forth. In that we greatly resemble birds, who in the glad season assume the so-called "*livrea d'amore*" to please their future mate, who, later on, will help to build the nest. But what follows? Afterwards we lose all self-control, rivalry poisons our blood, passion blinds us, for a woman we look daggers at each other, before her we quarrel, we tear each other in pieces like lions. So true it is that in one man alone there are many kinds of beasts!

In getting up the fair-haired seraph had turned towards the entrance of the old ruined chamber. The light from the nave reminded him that he had not closed the door, and that perhaps it would be prudent to do so in order thus to have time to get up

from the floor should anyone suddenly appear. This was not probable, as all the monks were assembled in chapter, and the lay-brother and servants were elsewhere; but it was just possible, and our little monk went to shut the door. Just then he heard a noise of footsteps which made him tremble. That which was possible was becoming probable. If he were to be found there what explanation could he give? Fortunately with the noise of steps there was the sound of a voice, and the little monk recognised his uncle, who, not having been admitted to the chapter-house had entered the church.

He ran at once to the landing place, looked through the opening and called to his uncle with that subdued whistle already mentioned, while with his hand he made a sign to him to remain where he was, he himself being obliged to stop up there.

But either Father Prospero had not understood the seraph's pantomime or else he ex-

pected some further explanation, for he had advanced as far as under the cornice. Then the seraph leaned over the gallery, and covering his mouth with his hands, gave his uncle this wise piece of advice—

"Take a book and read till I come. I will tell you everything when I have heard what they would not allow you to listen to."

The seraph had lowered his voice a tone; but he pronounced the syllables so distinctly that the whole of his speech reached his uncle's ear.

"How the devil can she know that they would not let me hear?" he thought to himself, wondering. "Ah; I have it, I have it. If she can hear up there what they say she must also have heard that they refused to admit me."

And, delighted with this discovery, Father Prospero bowed his head with that air of *fiat voluntas tua* which he assumed every time the seraph showed that he was bent on

something. In proof of his accustomed obedience, he approached the nearest shelf, took down the first book he found and proceeded to bury himself in literature, but not until he had buried himself in an easy chair stuffed with wool, in which it was a delight to sit.

Little Father Adelindo meanwhile had returned to his corner to listen.

END OF VOL. I.